

SPECIAL SUMMER
DOUBLE ISSUE

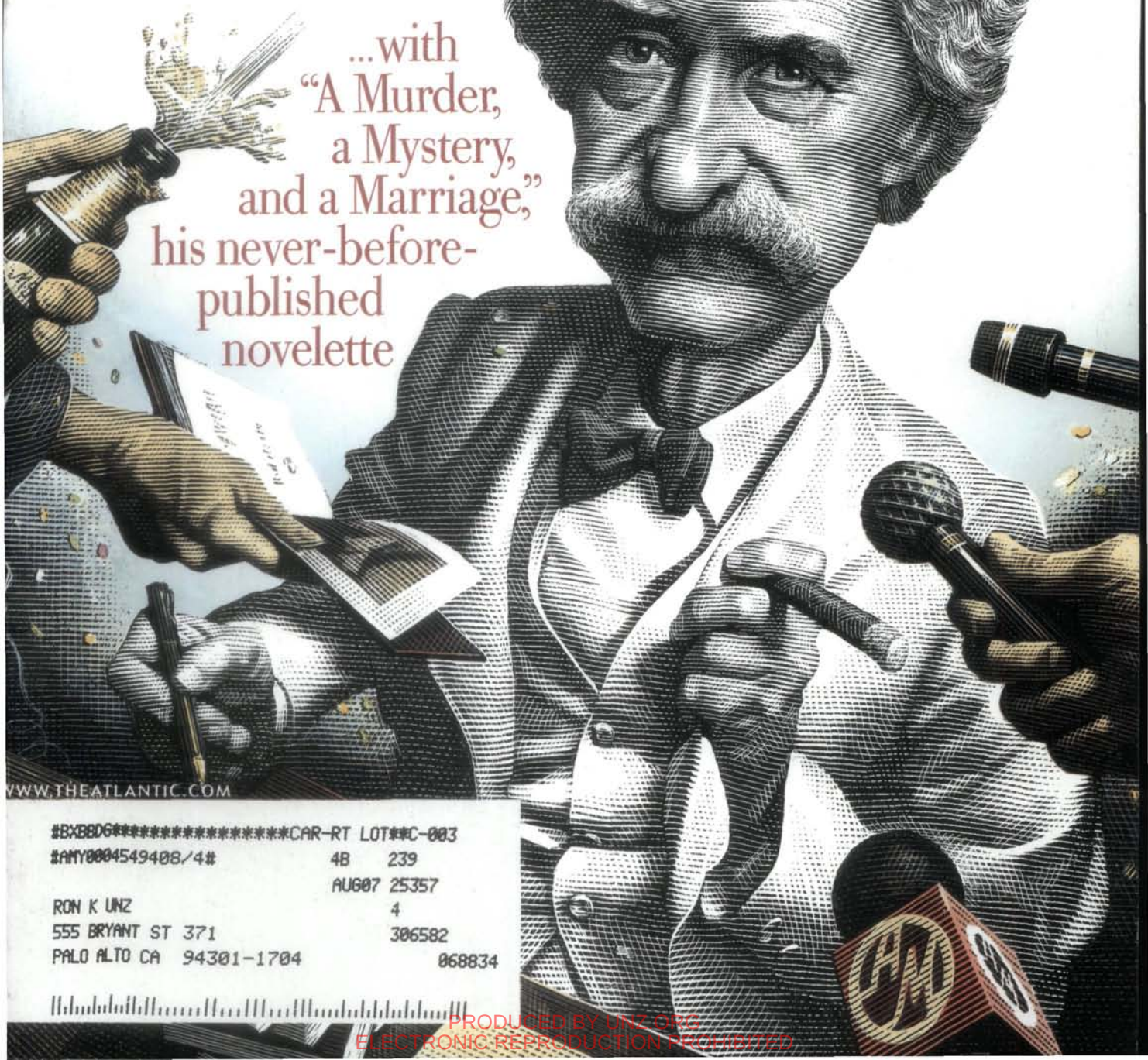
Atlantic

JULY/AUGUST 2001

MONTHLY

MARK TWAIN RETURNS!

...with
"A Murder,
a Mystery,
and a Marriage,"
his never-before-
published
novelette



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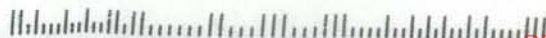
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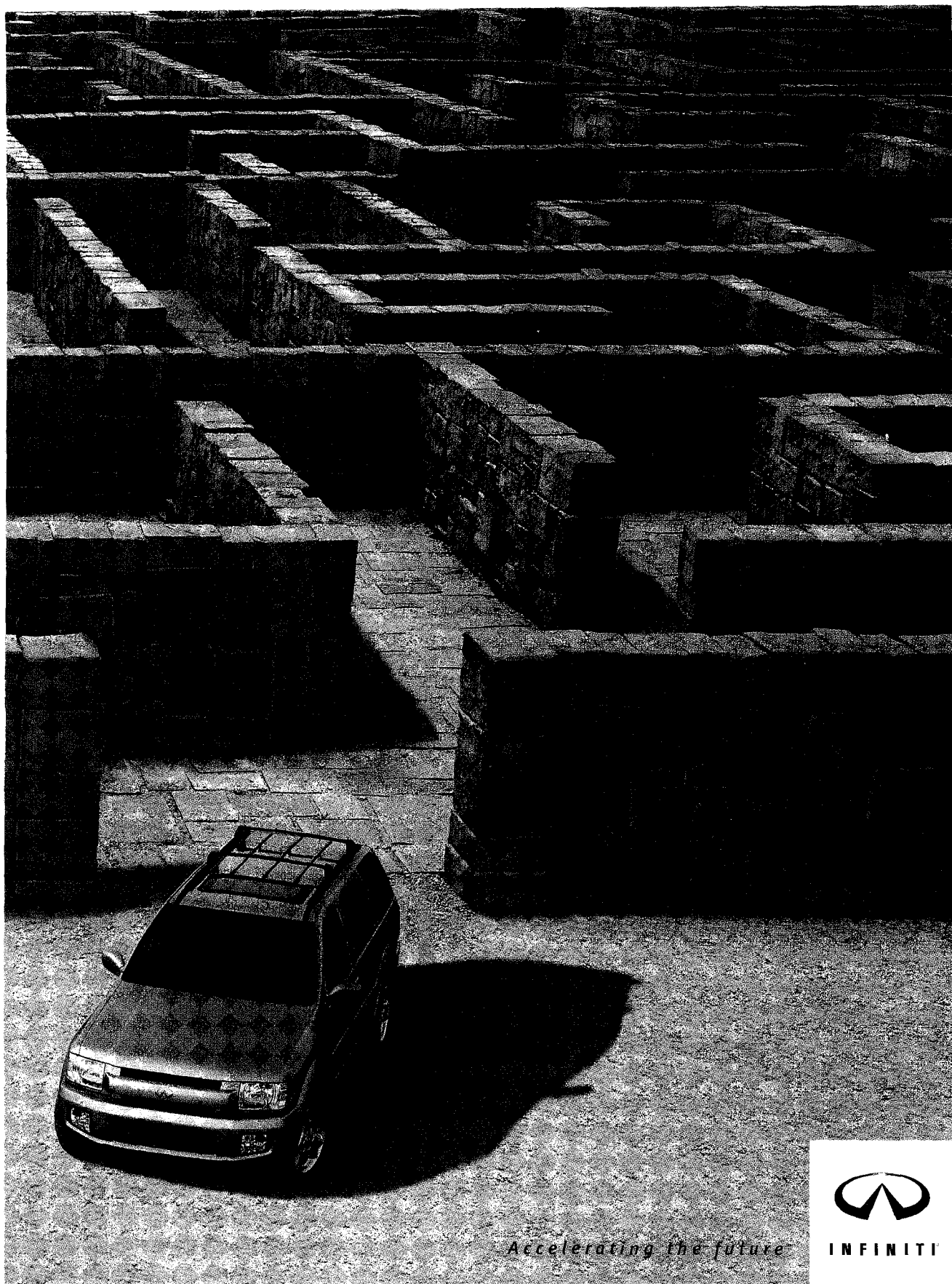


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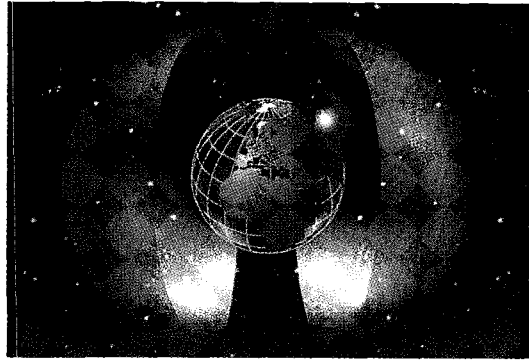
Corporate Citizenship: A Global Compact

Corporate citizenship and sound business practices are viewed in some quarters as mutually exclusive. If that notion was ever valid, it is certainly out of synch with present-day realities.

The private sector's impact on economic growth, social progress, and the health of the environment has never been greater than today. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), more than half the world's 100 biggest economies today are corporations, and the volume of private, transnational capital flows exceeds government development funding in emerging markets by a factor of five. To abdicate responsibilities of corporate citizenship on the pretext that profits will suffer is more than merely cynical. It is dangerous.

A myopic perspective

Moreover, from a business perspective, it is woefully short-sighted. In today's interconnected world, no company can afford to view the world and its

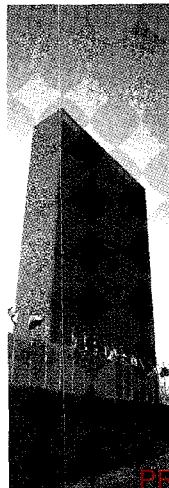


relationship to it solely through the lens of profit and loss. Nor can any company hope to achieve lasting competitive leverage by addressing shareholder needs in isolation from those of its employees, its customers and the communities where it operates.

Far from compromising financial performance, corporate citizenship enhances it.

Where profit and principle meet

It is no coincidence that the most successful companies are those that place the highest premium on social and environmental responsibility. Their values are demonstrated on multiple levels –



philanthropy, volunteerism, community leadership and, perhaps most telling, actions: Companies that treat their employees, community and the environment responsibly are better positioned for long-term growth and financial success.

A unique opportunity

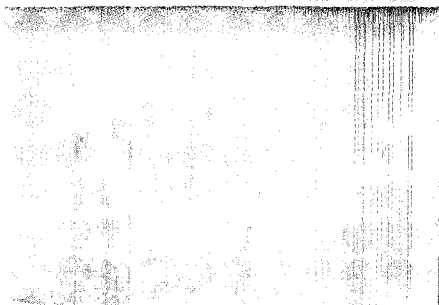
The UN's Global Compact raises corporate responsibility to the next level. Launched in July 2000, it has been signed by more than 50 international companies,



including ABB, who recognize the unique opportunity it presents to integrate more closely with their political, social and economic surroundings.

But the Global Compact also imposes an obligation to play a more active role





...knowledge and...
collaboration...
another, with suppliers
and customers, and with
governments, NGOs, UN
agencies and organized labor.
Protecting the environment,
protecting human rights,
improving labor standards:
these are the aims of the
Global Compact.



Innovative technologies
must figure centrally in
attaining these objectives.
At ABB, an awareness of our



community and stakeholder
obligations drives much
of our research and
development.

We have developed new
techniques for reducing
greenhouse emissions and

harnessing renewable, non-
polluting energy sources,
such as wind power, micro-
gas turbines and fuel cells.

And the application of
knowledge-based
solutions in automation
and industrial controls is
already yielding
improvements in living
standards, working
conditions and public
health in many areas of
the world. For example,
advanced processes for
water purification and
desalination are helping
to bring adequate supplies
of drinking water to many
developing countries for
the first time.

Global scope, local focus

The Global Compact is
not about imposing
western cultural values
on the developing world.
On the contrary, its
purpose is to ensure that
all reap the rewards of
global prosperity.
Notwithstanding its
universal scope, its most
important work
must take place at the
local level, with the
full participation of local
stakeholders. But



transparency and access to
information are essential.
In pursuing a common
goal we needn't – indeed,
we mustn't – attempt to
homogenize viewpoints or
cultural perspectives.
Instead we must always be
willing to discuss our
differences openly.



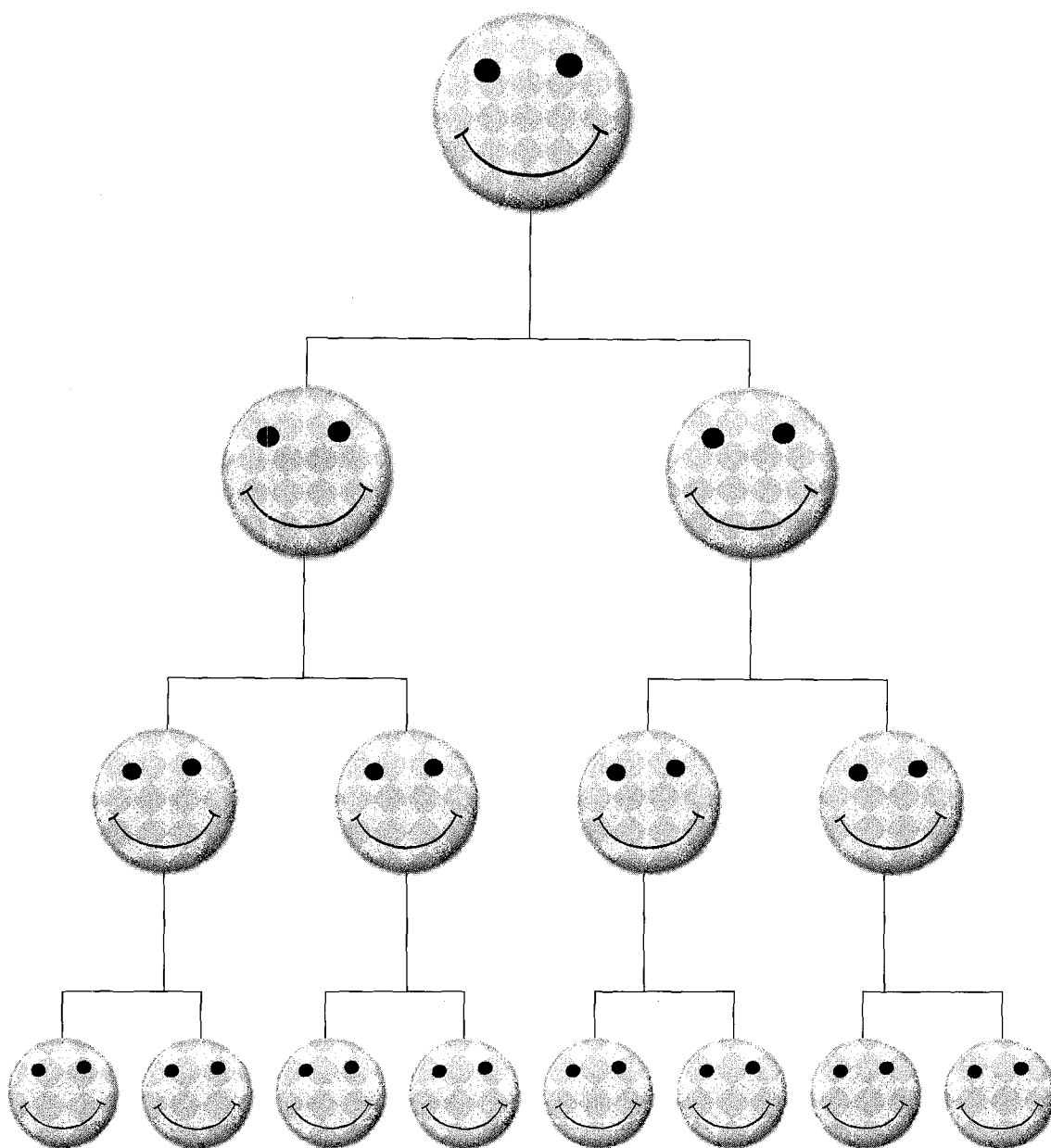
A shared responsibility

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THE Atlantic

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Who was that exotic stranger in the benighted town of Deer Lick, Missouri? And by what means had he arrived? "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage," a story written for *The Atlantic* 125 years ago, begins on page 54 *by Mark Twain*

In his foreword (page 49) and afterword (page 67), *Roy Blount Jr.* describes the peculiar genesis of the story—and explains how it reflects an important turning point in Twain's career

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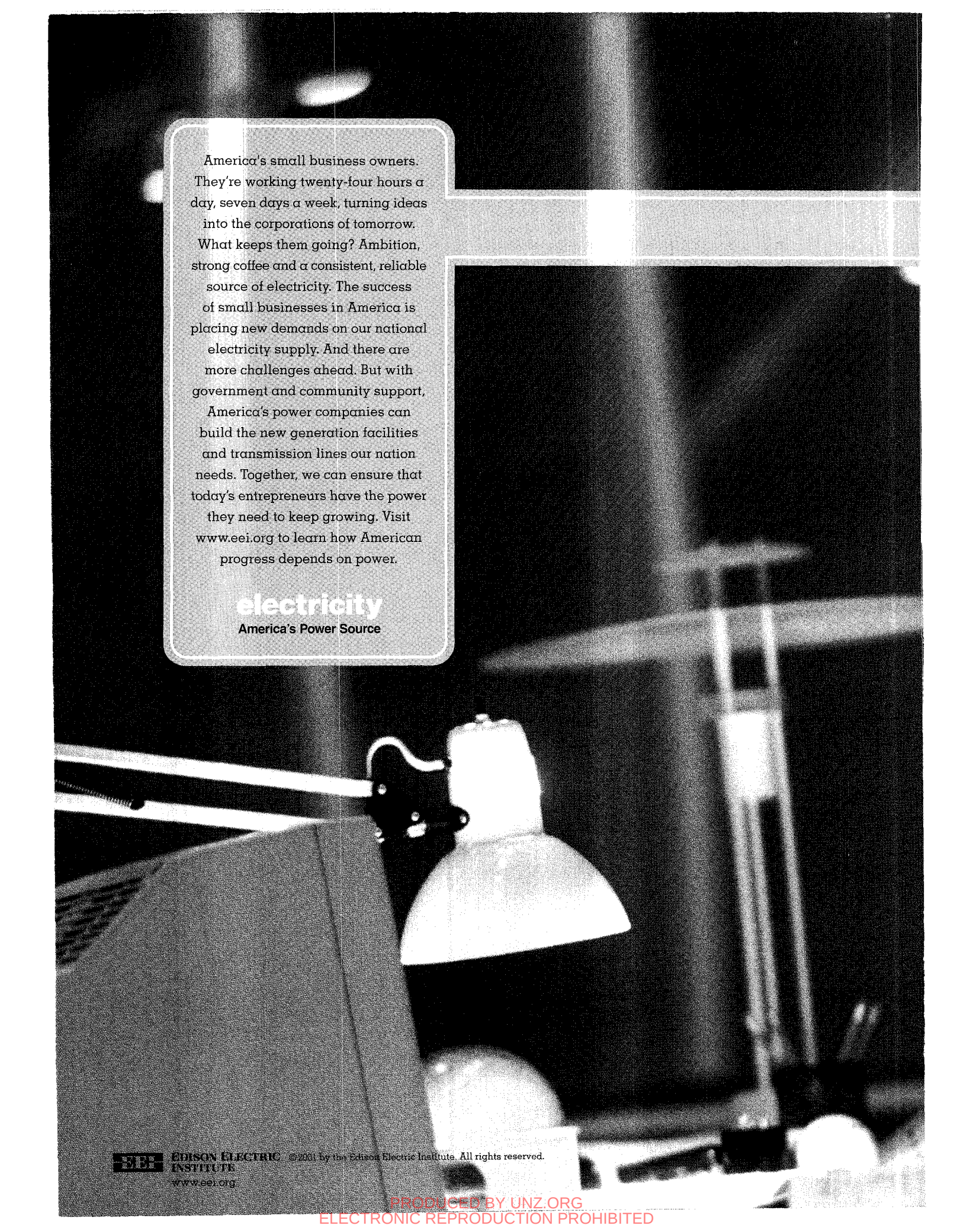
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Cover drawing by Mark Summers; heading drawings throughout by Istvan Banyai



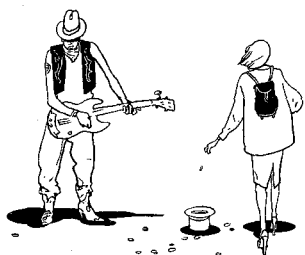
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77 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET

A hundred and twenty-five years ago Mark Twain wrote what he called a "novelette" for *The Atlantic Monthly*. This month we are publishing that 8,000-word story, which Twain titled "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage." This seems at first like the ultimate joke about the rude and deleterious habits of editors in replying to the queries of freelance writers. One imagines the magazine's fiction committee, four bearded gentlemen and a lady of a certain age, reporting to the literary editor: "We have reached a decision on the matter of the story by Mr. Twain. In our judgment, it may be published. We will now take up the matter of the poem by Mr. Whitman."

The truth is, we just sort of forgot about Mr. Twain's submission for a century and a quarter, until reminded of it by the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, one of the country's important Twain repositories. The vagaries of the story make for a story in themselves, as the humorist and writer Roy Blount Jr. explains in a foreword and afterword. But what about the novelette—is it important? Does its rediscovery matter beyond the mere fact of the thing?

Blount argues yes, and his reasons for this begin with the novel *Huckleberry Finn*. Ernest Hemingway said, as Blount reminds us, that all modern American literature began with that book. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain found not only his own voice but the primal version of what would come to be seen as the voice of the modern American novel—the voice, really, of the modern American sensibility.

This is the voice that rings through the writings of H. L. Mencken and Ring Lardner, through the films of W. C. Fields and Preston Sturges, through the journalism of A. J. Liebling and Tom Wolfe. It is intelligent but not intellectual—it places at least as much value on street smarts as on other forms. It insists on clarity, both in truth-telling and in story-telling. It is brutal in its candor about what people do to one another, but it is not approving of brutality. It is egalitarian and humanistic. It is to some degree cynical, but in an American, not a European, way: a faith in the capacity for redemption shines dimly but persistently through bleakness. In style it is deceptively straightforward, deceptively casual.

It depends greatly on humor—humor more than wit—and it scorns, and scores off, all manner of pretension.

Twain's story is the first offering in a special, double issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. (The next issue will be September.) The July/August issue celebrates and explores, in various ways, the American Century that Twain ushered in with *Huckleberry Finn*. It includes a short story, "Show-and-Tell," by the southern writer George Singleton—the first of Singleton's stories that *The Atlantic* has published. In its subversive funniness this is writing that Twain would have recognized as kin to his own. In "The Mad Poets Society," Alex Beam offers a look at a particular small corner of modern American literary life: McLean Hospital, in suburban Boston, which admitted more than its share of delusional poets. Beam writes

about three of the most famous residents, Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, and Anne Sexton.

Finally, in this discussion of the American Century, we come to the end of the line that Twain begat, in B. R. Myers's "A Reader's Manifesto." The cultural establishment, Myers writes, never tires of telling us how lucky we are to be living and reading in these times. He begs to differ, in a splenetic and unforgiving polemical romp. Myers chooses five of America's most celebrated novelists as exem-

plars of one variety or another of prose that he condemns as intended not so much to entertain readers as to impress upon them, repeatedly, the news that they are in the presence of a Great Writer. His essay is certainly provoking; he intends it to be. He writes not as a literary critic (indeed, he has never been published as such) but as a reader, outraged and seeking to be outrageous in turn. Myers is thirty-seven years old and lives in Los Lunas, New Mexico. He was educated in South Africa and Germany. He wrote "A Reader's Manifesto" for himself, and then sent it to *The Atlantic* on speculation. We thought about waiting 125 years to publish it, but Myers was insistent. What's to be done about the situation he describes? "At the very least, the critics could start toning down their hyperbole," Myers writes. "How better to ensure that Faulkner and Melville remain unread by the young than to invoke their names in praise of some new bore every week?" —MICHAEL KELLY



*The Mark Twain Room of the
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library*

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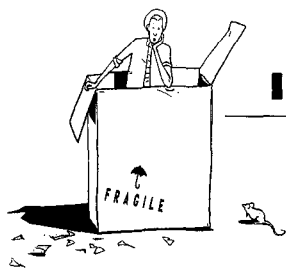


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IN THIS ISSUE

A hundred and twenty-five years after **Mark Twain** wrote "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage" for the editors of *The Atlantic Monthly*, the story makes its appearance with an introduction and an afterword by **Roy Blount Jr.** Blount is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic*. His biography of Robert E. Lee will be published next year.

Following its publication, in 1940, Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory* came under the scrutiny of Vatican censors.

Peter Godman ("Graham Greene's Vatican Dossier") has excavated their previously undisclosed discussions from the archives of the Holy See, providing a rare glimpse into the Vatican's secret deliberations on matters of art, artists, and belief. Godman is a professor of medieval and Renaissance Latin at the University of Tübingen, in Germany. He is at work on the first full-scale biography of Giulio Antonio Santori, the Roman Grand Inquisitor of the late sixteenth century. His article in this issue is drawn from *Die geheime Inquisition*, published this year by Paul List Verlag (Munich).

McLean Hospital, in a suburb of Boston, has long been the nation's most literary mental institution. **Alex Beam** ("The Mad Poets Society") traces McLean's influence on the lives and art of three of its most famous residents: the poets Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, and Anne Sexton. Beam is a columnist for *The Boston Globe* and the author of two novels. His book about McLean, *Gracefully Insane*, will be published in January by PublicAffairs.

Never mind what the critics are saying, most modern "literary" fiction is pretentiously clumsy, writes **B. R. Myers** ("A Reader's Manifesto"), who takes aim at the prose styles of Cormac McCarthy, Don DeLillo, Paul Auster, and other acclaimed novelists. Myers lives and writes in New Mexico.

George Singleton ("Show-and-Tell") teaches fiction writing at the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities. His fiction has appeared in *Harper's*, *Playboy*, and *The Southern Review*. Singleton's first collection, *These People Are Us*, was published in April.

In Notes & Dispatches this month: **Charles Truheart** reports from Paris, on the bemusing aspects of raising expatriated children; **Eyal Press**, from Bloomington, Indiana, on the quiet return of a professor run out of town by basketball fanatics; **Renel Marc Gerecht**, from Peshawar, on why Usama bin Ladin has little to fear from U.S. intelligence agencies; **Joshua Kurlantzick**, from Singapore, on that country's answer to a declining birth rate—the "All-Out Make-Out" campaign; and **Bill Donahue**, from Tybee Island, Georgia, on a quixotic plan to recover a long-lost bomb.

Miraculous yet often unseen, the modern-day infrastructure of most cities is ignored by travel guides and travelers alike. **Emily Hiestand** ("Real Places") leads readers on a tour of man-made wonders. Hiestand's *Atlantic* essay "Hymn," reprinted in her collection *Angela the Upside-Down Girl*, won a 1999 National Magazine Award.

Stephen Budiansky ("Liquid Refreshment") explains how to prevent a garden pond from becoming an affront to the senses. Budiansky is a correspondent for *The Atlantic*. The paperback edition of his book *The Truth About Dogs* (2000) will be published in October.

Almost twenty years ago **William Zinsser** ("Field of Tin") began a search for a favorite toy from childhood. This month he recounts a long-awaited play-date with another enthusiast of the Wolverine mechanical Pennant Win-

ner baseball game. The twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of Zinsser's classic book *On Writing Well* will be published this summer. His newest book is *Easy to Remember: The Great American Songwriters and Their Songs* (2001).

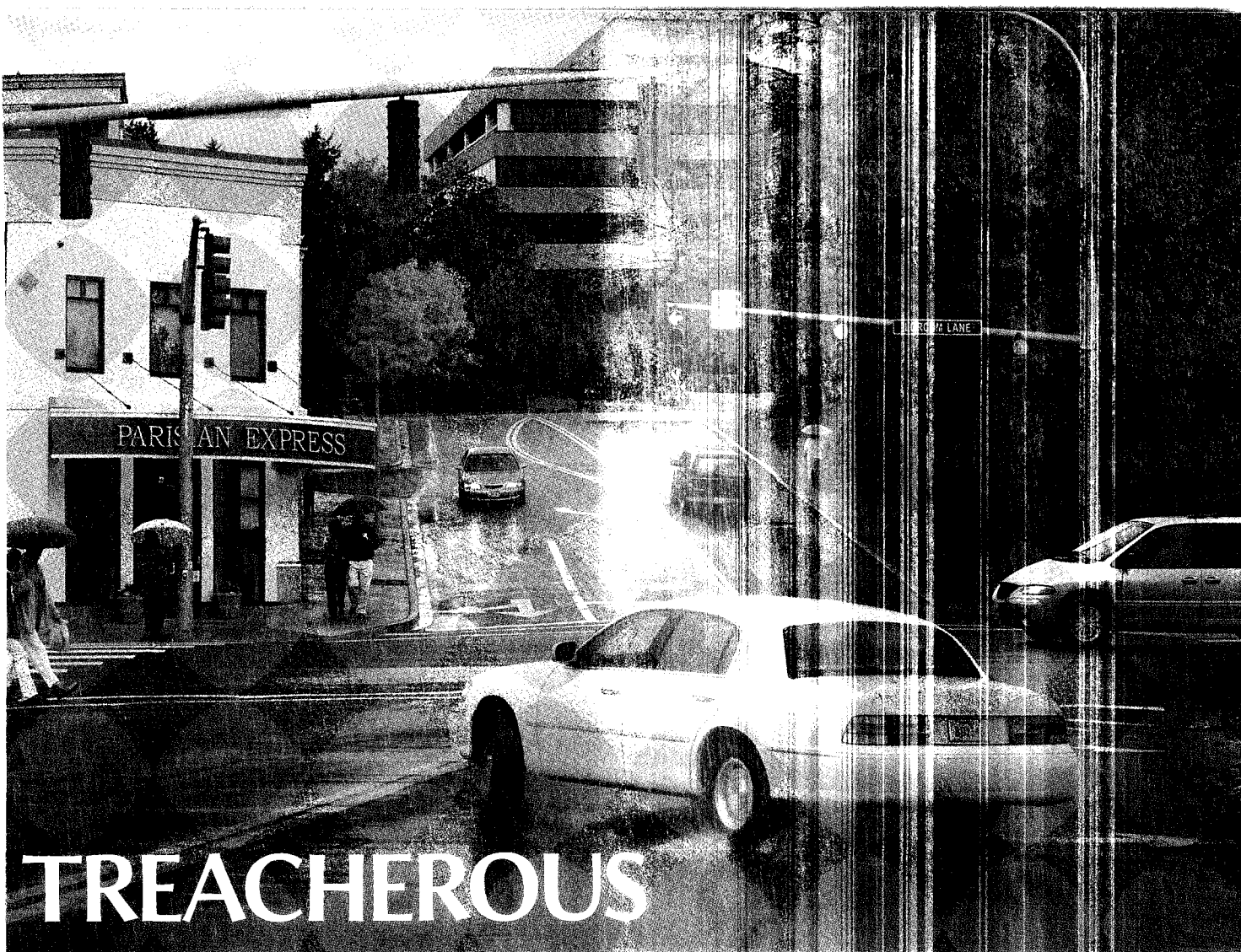
Are small, independent bookstores necessarily better than Borders or Barnes & Noble? **Brooke Allen** ("Two—Make That Three—Cheers for the Chain Bookstores") refutes the claim that the superstores are a blight. Allen is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Hudson Review*.

Stephen Amidon ("A Harrowing Mirror of Loneliness") reviews the newly released complete collection of short stories by Richard Yates. Amidon, a former film critic for London's *Financial Times*, is the author of four novels, including *The New City* (2000).

Where did the tabloids originate—and what makes them so compelling? **Caidin Flanagan** ("The Tabloid Habit") investigates. Flanagan's review of wedding-etiquette and -survival guides appeared in the February *Atlantic*.

Margaret Drabble ("Wharton's Sharp Eye") surveys the ghostly tales and gimlet-eyed observations that fill the recently released two-volume collection of Edith Wharton's short stories. Drabble is the author of fourteen novels and two biographies. Her most recent novel is *The Peppered Moth* (2001).

Steeped in rock but grounded in classical, Philip Glass's music has a unique crossover appeal. **David Schiff** ("In Glass's House") explores why, despite the ambivalence of the critics, Glass remains "America's best-known composer of art music." Schiff has written more than a dozen articles on music for *The Atlantic*.



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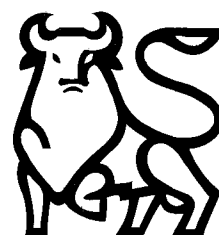


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This month on the Web . . .

From the Archive: A cache of writing by Mark Twain from the pages of *The Atlantic*, including Twain's first piece of fiction to appear in the magazine—"A True Story," from November, 1874. Plus, William Dean Howells's influential contemporary reviews of Twain's *Innocents Abroad* (1869) and *Tom Sawyer* (1876).

Interviews: Read recent interviews with Karen Armstrong, Nicholson Baker, Louise Erdrich, James Fallows, A. L. Kennedy, Glyn Maxwell, Diane Ravitch, Eric Schlosser, Charles Simic, and others.

Soundlines: Yeats, Whitman, Jonson, Hardy, Frost, Dickinson, Shakespeare, Bishop, Marvell, Lowell. Read by Richard Wilbur, Peter Davison, Robert Pinsky, Philip Levine, Maxine Kumin, Mary Jo Salter, W. S. Merwin, Mark Strand, Linda Gregerson, Frank Bidart, and many others.

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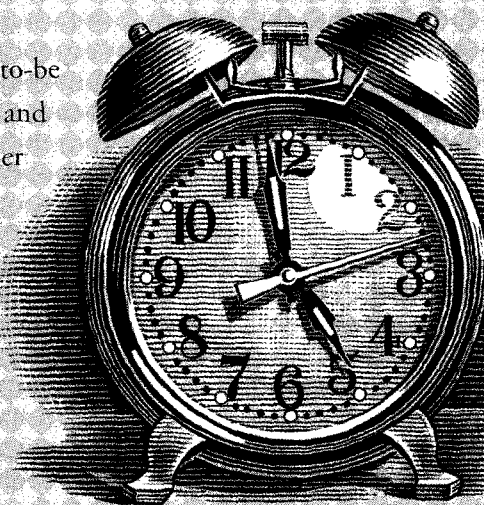


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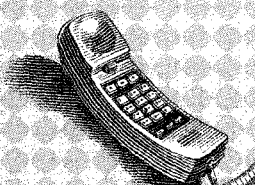
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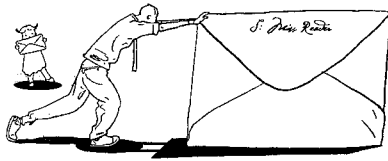
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Organization Kids

David Brooks describes well our contemporary academic culture ("The Organization Kid," April *Atlantic*), but he doesn't draw the logical conclusions from his own premises. He writes, for example, "If they are indeed running the country in a few decades, we'll be in fine shape. It will be a good country." My question to Brooks would be: How could a generation so lacking in civic capacity, so indifferent to virtue, so uncritical of even the worst abuses in our society, possibly qualify as leaders of a democratic country?

*Bernard Murchland
Delaware, Ohio*

As a senior at Princeton University, I was shocked and insulted to read David Brooks's article in your April issue. The typical Princeton student is depicted as a power-hungry, overzealous, career-driven workaholic with no better goals or desires than chasing the "carrot" put before him by Wall Street. Brooks backs up his position with damning statements by supposedly "typical" Princeton students who claim that they do homework in their sleep, schedule appointments with their friends, and have no serious relationships because of their drive to advance their careers.

Mr. Brooks, where did you find these people? My experience at Princeton has not been different from that of most people here, and I assure you that I am not the robot Brooks portrayed in his article. I have two-hour lunches, a serious relationship, nine hours of sleep a night, tons of close friends, lots of leisure time, and a happy, healthy attitude toward my future. I go out at night; I read the paper every morning; I exercise in the middle of the afternoon; I skip classes; I lie around and chat with my friends; I shop; and I procrastinate

just as much as any other student in the world, and I'm still happy with my grades.

*Dina Nayeri
Princeton, N.J.*

Today's college students are far from the complacent, self-interested social climbers that Brooks makes us out to be. We may have grown up in a time of peace and prosperity, but that does not mean that we see the world as "fundamentally just"; nor does it mean that we look contentedly on the current order of things. We do not have our heads stuck in the ground; as we grew up, we saw the beating of Rodney King, the spread of AIDS, violence in our schools, and the arrogant moralizing of the Religious Right. We watched all of this, and we formed our own opinions.

We also formed our own opinions about the generation before us, and we saw how our parents' form of campus protest (and their conduct in positions of power) was fundamentally narcissistic. Rather than march or chant slogans, today's college students actively work for social justice, whether through volunteering time, joining advocacy groups, or gearing our careers toward fields in which we can make a difference. The goal is to make progress, not to please ourselves with our self-righteousness.

And we also recognize that making progress is not incompatible with achievement. Unlike the previous generation of social climbers, who were motivated primarily by personal gain, our generation brings empathy, ethics, and, yes, character to the work force. The Princeton professor is right when he says that we see no contradiction in working for Save the Children and Merrill Lynch at the same time, because most of us think it is possible to reconcile ethics with capitalism. In thirty years, when my generation is running Citibank and Merrill

Lynch, our leadership will be more ethical and less self-interested than that of the generations previous to ours.

*James Thompson
New York, N.Y.*

In reading David Brooks's article on the quiescent and respectful undergraduates of Princeton, I was surprised to see no reference whatsoever to the recent efforts of these same undergraduates to change Princeton's labor practices. Since last November, when undergraduates founded the Workers' Rights Organizing Committee, hundreds of students (along with eighty-five faculty members, alumni, religious leaders, and others) have put pressure on the Princeton administration to pay better wages and offer better working conditions to low-wage employees in the university's libraries, dining halls, and dormitories.

These students have teamed up with unions and rank-and-file workers, lobbied administrators, and staged large demonstrations. So far they've forced the university to change some of its policies, and they're still busy organizing and protesting on the issues that have not yet been resolved.

*Nick Guyatt
Princeton, N.J.*

David Brooks cites a conversation he had with a conservative young lady who interned for Senator Jesse Helms last summer. As far as I know, I am the only person from Princeton who interned for Senator Helms last summer, or any other recent summer. I do not, however, remember having had a conversation with Mr. Brooks. If I was having a conversation, I did not realize it was being reported on. Could Mr. Brooks have written the wrong senator's name?

*Amanda Neely
Raleigh, N.C.*

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I found "The Organization Kid" offensive. As a victim of acquaintance rape, I can assure David Brooks that not all the males on this campus are particularly eager to "apologize for their testosterone." But perhaps he would just seize this as further evidence that Princeton students, for all our accomplishments, are morally spineless.

*Sarah Miller
Princeton University Class of 2003
Princeton, N.J.*

Regarding "The Organization Kid": I'd like to write a letter in response to this article, but I don't have enough time in my schedule this week.

*Roxanne Khamisi
Dartmouth College Class of 2002
Hanover, N.H.*

David Brooks replies:

I was a little taken aback by the ferocity that greeted this piece. I wasn't much surprised that many students at Princeton objected; nobody likes to be written about in less than gushing terms, let alone bright young people who are used to being gushed over. The more surprising response came from middle-aged folks who loathe these kids, and who are upset that I don't loathe them too. Generating the most protest were the passages in which I wrote that the young achievers "are wonderful to be around," that if they end up running the country, we'll be in fine shape, and that Princeton today is "infinitely more just, and certainly more intellectual and curious" than it used to be.

Many middle-aged people seem to have romantic notions about how young people are supposed to behave. They want students to be angry, radicalized, crusading, and they detest students who don't fit this mold. But radical, angry young people are almost always insufferable. I much prefer radicals who have at least aged a bit and seen something of the world. I'll take these deferential Princetonians any day.

Amanda Neely doesn't remember talking to me. I don't blame her. Six months passed between the time we spoke and publication of my article, and I'm not that memorable a guy. She was part of a politics seminar that had a reunion dinner while I was on campus, to which I was kindly invited. The professor, Stephen Macedo, explained who I was and why I was there, and I reiterated that I

was writing a piece. Among other things, Ms. Neely and I chatted about her father's unsuccessful run for governor of North Carolina.

Genes and Race

Steve Olson's article "The Genetic Archaeology of Race" (April *Atlantic*) ends with the sanguine conclusion that intermarriage or genetic engineering will dispense with such distinguishing characteristics of human beings as face and skin.

Does anyone see the irony of the contrast between the huge efforts being made by environmentalists to save little critters like the snail darter and tiny pieces of plant life from extinction while ignoring the real possibility that human characteristics like blue eyes or black skin will probably disappear in one great blend? Do we really want such differences to disappear forever?

The politically correct word today is "diversity," yet the end, as Olson suggests, will be homogeneity.

*Carol P. Cooke
Charleston, S.C.*

Steve Olson writes, "Every [human] group overlaps genetically with every other." This is true. He goes on to say, "The extreme interpretation of this observation, now popular in academia, is that biological groups do not exist. That's obviously absurd. The ways in which Nigerians, Koreans, and Norwegians differ physically belie any claim that all human groups are somehow 'socially constructed.'"

The idea that biological groups do not exist, however, is neither extreme nor absurd. Genetic and physical (or "phenotypic") variations in the human population occur across a continuum. Any "groups" are necessarily defined by externally imposed criteria. They don't exist inherently within the biological information itself. Clusters of similar data within the continuum may suggest groups—Nigerians, Koreans, and Norwegians—but the edges of these clusters inevitably bleed into one another, and ultimately a judgment call must be made about into which group a particular datapoint, or individual, will fall. These decisions determine how groups are defined and constructed.

All human groups are most certainly constructed, socially (blacks, whites, and yellows), scientifically (defined ranges of melanin content per cell), or otherwise.

*Jake Sibley
San Diego, Calif.*

I was appalled to see an anti-scientific and unabashedly "PC" article in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Steve Olson expressed what can only be termed a precognition regarding the outcome of genetic research, by declaring, a priori, that such research will prove that no genetic differences exist between the races. True scientific research, however, is not conducted to "prove" politically acceptable and emotionally comforting notions. The scientific method was developed to militate against such prejudices. The precept that genetic traits are not equally distributed among human populations is not logically absurd, and in fact defines the term "subspecies," the scientific word for race (though lacking the latter's pernicious connotations).

Recent genetic research has, in fact, shown quite the opposite to Olson's prejudicial precognition. A branch of pharmacology called ethno-pharmacology recognizes that people from different ethnic groups tend to react differently to the same drugs, owing to inherent physiological differences. A gene was also recently discovered that confers a predisposition to addiction and gambling, both of which are complex behaviors. This gene is unequally distributed among human populations: 30 percent of Chinese possess the gene, as compared with 10 percent of whites and two percent of blacks. The list of recently discovered genes influencing complex human behaviors includes those for sleep patterns, pain perception, eating habits, personality, sociability, and intelligence (Einstein's brain was physiologically different from the average person's).

All these recent genetic discoveries give me a precognition different from Olson's: many important human behavioral traits may have genetic underpinnings, and these traits may not be equally distributed among human populations. This makes me not a "racist" but a "subspeciest."

*Michael Klewin
Lawrenceville, N.J.*



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Steve Olson replies:

I have followed the literature linking genes to behavior for a long time, and here's what I've concluded. The more complex and therefore interesting a human trait, the less satisfactorily can DNA account for that trait. Sure, genetic factors are responsible for simple activities—our need to eat, for example. But as a behavior becomes more nuanced and psychological, more human, the influence of chance events and experience builds until the genetic foundations of the behavior are barely discernible. Furthermore, to the extent that genetic differences in behavior do exist, they will be especially small when averaged across groups, since the average genetic differences among individuals within a group are much greater than the average genetic differences between groups.

Alan Templeton, of Washington University, and other geneticists have shown that human beings are much too genetically homogenous to be divided into subspecies according to the criteria applied to other animals. Given our remarkable uniformity, why posit mysterious genetic forces to explain historical events when cultural and social explanations suffice?

The Day Reagan Was Shot

In "The Day Reagan Was Shot" (April *Atlantic*), Richard V. Allen refers to "Secretary of State Haig's misunderstanding of the constitutional chain of succession." Although presidential succession beyond the Vice President sounds like something that should be in the Constitution, it isn't. Instead Article II, Section 1 grants Congress the authority to establish the chain of succession.

The Presidential Succession Act of 1947 amended the 1886 law by placing the speaker of the House and the president pro tempore of the Senate ahead of the Secretary of State. Thus Haig's mistake was legal, not constitutional.

*David d'Ancona
New York, N.Y.*

The most apparent thing in the White House transcript you reproduced was Caspar Weinberger's confusion over the state of defense readiness and the levels of "Defcon." The transcript confirms the portrait in Haig's memoirs of a baffled Weinberger and the critical

need to reassure the Soviets in light of an ambiguous alert order.

Allen has no videotape to confirm his observation of Haig's wobbly knees, white knuckles, and "involuntary body movements." That is unfortunate, because the transcripts indicate that Haig, more than anyone else in the Situation Room, seemed to know what he was talking about. Indeed, he was the senior member of the executive branch in the White House until the arrival of the Vice President, and he had every right to take charge.

*Kenneth Weisbrode
Boston, Mass.*

Richard V. Allen replies:

David d'Ancona is correct that the Constitution does not specify presidential succession and that the Presidential Succession Act of 1947 is the operable law, and I should have so noted in my article.

Kenneth Weisbrode seems to think that Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger was "confused" and "baffled" about the state of defense readiness on March 30, 1981. He can be assured that Weinberger was clear of mind and speech at a critical time. In the absence of the Vice President, Weinberger had the command authority. Moreover, Mr. Weisbrode suggests that someone needed to "reassure the Soviets in light of an ambiguous alert order." I don't agree. Weinberger, noting that the Strategic Air Command had gone on alert when President Kennedy was shot, did not formally increase Defcon but prudently moved SAC pilots closer to their cockpits, a measure that would save three or four minutes. That action, a heightened state of alert, was not an increase in Defcon but was within Defcon 4, SAC's normal state of readiness. Weinberger's decision was revealed and discussed in the Situation Room well before the now famous scene in the White House press room. As for Mr. Weisbrode's reference to videotape, I need only refer him to the video archives of every major domestic and international network present in the press room to see for himself what actually went on there.

Advice & Consent

As a conservative Lutheran pastor, I found Cullen Murphy's article "Thy Will Be Done" (April *Atlantic*) rather

interesting. Studies like the ones described will never find a conclusive answer, however, because they ignore the full implication of the article's title.

Prayer studies rest on an invalid assumption: that sickness is evil. Perhaps, looking at the short time frame of birth to death, we can find many arguments for this. Yet when you have a time frame that ends in eternity, things in this life lose some of their importance.

My members and I certainly pray for healing and relief. But we also pray, and fully mean, "Thy will be done." The God who loved us enough to send his Son Jesus to die for our sins is not going to abandon us or forget his love for us.

*Rev. John Toppe
Whitewater, Wis.*

There is a footnote to the story about Red Friesell [who in 1940 mistakenly gave Cornell a fifth down and a victory over Dartmouth] mentioned in "Fine Points," by Cullen Murphy (March *Atlantic*). After the apparent Cornell victory a great many observers and Dartmouth fans put up a howl of protest. Cornell officials reviewed the film and quickly saw that a fifth down had been inadvertently granted to Cornell amid the pandemonium of its last-minute drive to avert the 3-0 upset. The athletic director, James Lynah (I'm not sure I've spelled his last name correctly), and Coach Carl Snavely, and President Edmund Ezra Day—plus, no doubt, others—mulled over the correct response. They decided to give the game to Dartmouth. Coach Earl "Red" Blaik, later famed for his great Army teams, was not a man to turn down such a sportsmanlike offer. Some at Cornell might have thought he would say, "Aw shucks, thanks, but you guys keep it," but they didn't know what a competitor Red Blaik was. In any case, he is supposed to have telegraphed something like "Dartmouth accepts the victory, and congratulates and salutes Cornell, the honorable and honored opponent of her longest unbroken rivalry." *The Ronald Encyclopedia of Football* lists the game as Dartmouth 3, Cornell 0.

*Ivan N. Kaye
Boulder, Colo.*

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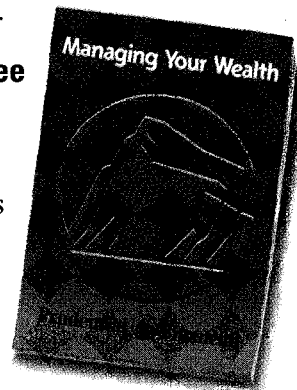
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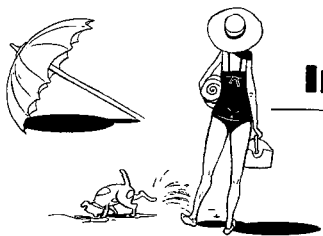


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It may not be the most banal sentence I ever wrote, but the banality was of a very high order. The sentence was "Children represent what society is going to become." I won't hide behind extenuating circumstances. The fact is that two decades ago these words flowed from my pen and were published under my name. Sadly, they failed to achieve oblivion. They were soon chanced upon by the governor of Maryland, Harry Hughes, who recognized a sentiment that he could stand foursquare behind. And, by golly, he didn't care who knew it! The governor incorporated the sentence into his annual State of the State address, taking pains to mention the author by name and adding the sober gloss "He is right."

This moment of searing embarrassment explains in part why I cringe whenever politicians vie with one another in their concern for the nation's children. The last presidential campaign was notable in this regard, with both candidates arguing that grown-ups bear a sacred responsibility to lift burdens from the young. George W. Bush criticized Al Gore for advocating policies that amounted to "a staggering tax increase on the next generation." Al Gore spoke of the need to "free our children from the burdens of the past being put on their shoulders in the future." It would be refreshing to hear someday a frank avowal by a national leader that the real plan is to let future generations deal with vast amounts of the present mess, the way we always have. Americans might even welcome the suggestion that some explicit portion of the unfinished national agenda—tort reform? metric conversion? mag-lev

trains?—be deposited in a vault every year, to be opened a generation later.

Pious rhetoric about children won't disappear anytime soon. And yet, oddly, the comment cited by the governor is not quite as banal today as it was when it was written. Indeed, in certain quarters—notably among some people without children, who resent the attention to child-friendly social policies—that sort of nod to the up-and-coming generation has actually become a source of grievance. The ranks of the childless have not yet coalesced into a full-fledged movement, but there are indications that one may soon emerge.

The basic story line of the evolution of bourgeois family life in the West, as laid out by Philippe Ariès and other historians, is by now familiar. Children were once an economic necessity, and childhood was accordingly invested with little sentiment. In the Middle Ages, Ariès observed in his book *Centuries of Childhood* (1960),

[Children] immediately went straight into the great community of men, sharing in the work and play of their companions, old and young alike. The movement of collective life carried along in a single torrent all ages and classes, leaving nobody any time for solitude and privacy.



I bumped up against an indication in the street one day. Encountering an acquaintance unseen for years, I sought to fill her in on various doings, and mentioned that someone known to both of us had recently borne twins. The woman looked at me, her face composed into a mask of withering pity. She said, "Why must people breed?"

That all began to change with the rise of the middle class, the spread of learning, the decline of infant mortality, and so on—the usual suspects. "Henceforth," Ariès observed, "it was recognized that the child was not ready for life, and that he had to be subjected to a special treatment, a sort of quarantine, before he was allowed to join the adults."

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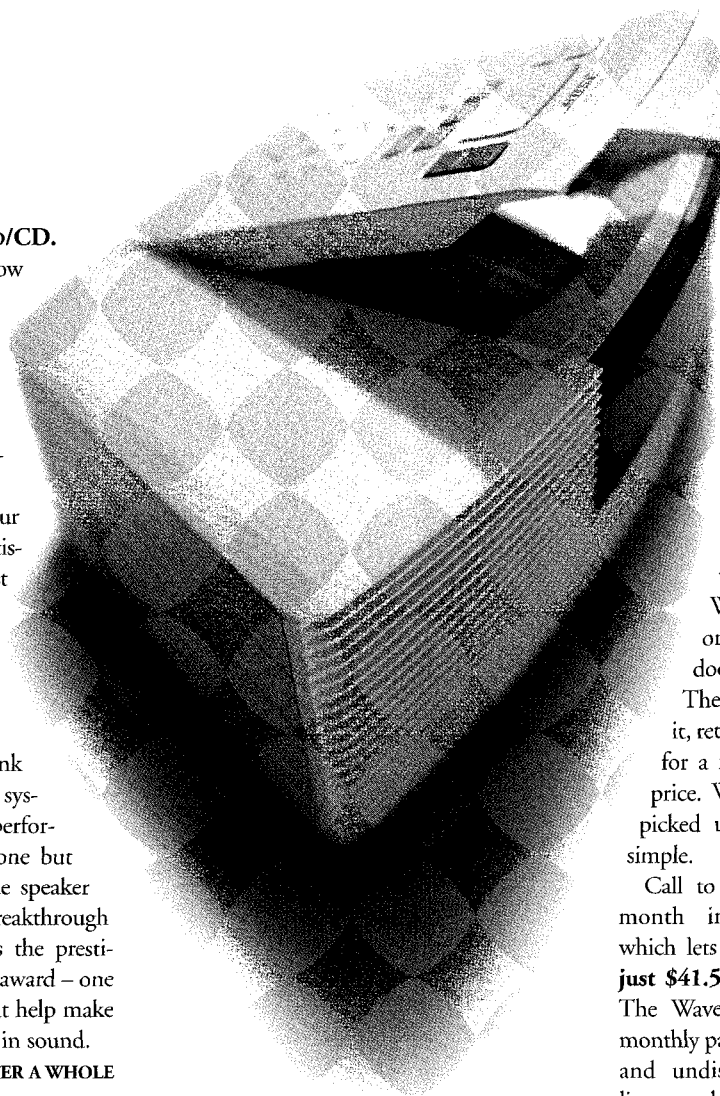
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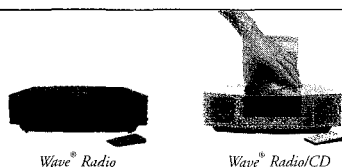
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For centuries this quarantine mainly took the form of school. But now, if activists for the rights of the childless have their way, it may acquire far greater scope—the exclusion of children from designated areas of public life. The ranks of the childless used to be an insignificant force in America. Not any longer. Childless people are today one of the fastest-growing segments of the work force. One woman in five over the age of forty has never given birth to a child, and most of those women never will. By 2005, according to the Census Bureau, the number of households with children will have been overtaken by the number of households consisting of single people or of married couples without children.

Not all these people have a gripe. Many of them do. Their Magna Carta is Elinor Burkett's *The Baby Boon: How Family-Friendly America Cheats the Childless* (2000). Burkett argues that people without children, like her, suffer from the consequences of a kind of affirmative action directed at parents—the time off for “family leave,” the on-site day-care centers, the flextime, the tax deduction for dependent children, the tax breaks for child care and college tuition. In the workplace, Burkett says, it is the childless who pick up the slack when a parent, or “breeder,” must run off to coach a Little League game or “to watch Susi dance *Swan Lake*.” At shopping malls, she reports, the childless seethe when confronted with the sign PARKING RESERVED FOR EXPECTANT MOTHERS AND PARENTS WITH INFANTS. Don't even bring up the recent suggestion, by Cornel West and Sylvia Ann Hewlett, that parents be allowed to cast an additional vote for each of their dependent children.

Burkett anticipates the day when the childless, whom activists prefer to call “the childfree,” will begin to demonstrate their clout.

The newly empowered childfree will sow havoc at school board meetings, over both bloated budgets and curricula that don't teach non-reproduction as an “alternative lifestyle.” They'll tie “family-friendly” corporations into legal knots with lawsuits alleging that the equal protection clause of the Constitution must be applied to nonreproducers.

Burkett looks forward to child-free sections in restaurants and airplanes and recreational areas, child-free hours in supermarkets and department stores, child-free options in housing. “Few issues send the childless into longer or more ear-splitting tirades,” she writes, “than the lack of such ‘adult-only’ spaces in which they might shop, dine, or swim without being drowned out by wailing infants or rammed into by rambunctious toddlers.”

I don't intend to join the growing debate over child-free zones. Understandably, many people deem the idea abhorrent; as the father of three, I confess to finding it all too compelling. But child-free zones are merely the latest instance of a far broader phenomenon—the proliferation of areas designed to be free of some undesirable social characteristic.

There are “smoke-free zones” in public accommodations, “truck-free zones” on residential streets, “campaign-free zones” around polling places, “skateboard-free zones” in parks, “cell-phone-free zones” in restaurants, “alcohol-free zones” in sports arenas. There are “car-free zones,” “trailer-free zones,” and “pesticide-free zones.” Cities and towns have proclaimed themselves “nuclear-free zones,” and activists in Aspen, Colorado, once sought to declare their city a “fur-free zone.” Moves are afoot to declare schools “commercial-free zones” (to keep advertising away) and to make the human genome an “IP-free zone” (to prevent sequencing data from being claimed as intellectual property).

A portion of Cape Cod has been set aside as a “gull-free zone,” and in Maryland officials concerned about an infestation of *Cygnus olor* have called for the enforcement of “swan-free zones” in the Chesapeake Bay. Mount Everest, littered with garbage left by decades of trekkers, is now a “bottle-free zone.” Officials worried about disruptions on campuses and city streets have sought to create “picket-free zones” and “protest-free zones” (confining demonstrators to an Orwellian precinct called a “free-speech zone”). The city council of Cincinnati, still angry with the commissioner of baseball for refusing to lift a lifetime

ban imposed on Pete Rose, has proposed turning Cincinnati into a “Bud Selig-free zone.” West Hollywood, worried about inhumane traps and nonmedical experiments on animals, is officially a “cruelty-free zone.” Attempts have been made to enact “violence-free zones” and “hate-free zones.” Peter Yarrow, of the folk group Peter, Paul and Mary, has mounted a campaign to turn classrooms into “ridicule-free zones.”

Some of these exclusionary zones make sense; others are absurd; many are unenforceable. Considered together, though, they suggest the degree to which the idea of customized quarantine has taken hold—the idea that we have at our disposal a diverse array of membranes against contaminating encroachments, and need only deploy them according to taste.

What we may soon be needing, if only for purposes of biodiversity, is “zone-free zones,” the social equivalent of wilderness preserves. Here, in pristine tracts set aside for the ages, refugees from civilization could savor a remnant of society in a wild and unzoned state. The zone-free-zone experience might, of course, be somewhat unsettling. Ominous tendrils of cigarette smoke from the trailer park might greet one's entrance. Wailing infants and rambunctious toddlers would be continually underfoot. Skateboarders in fur coats, talking on cell phones, could swoop by at any moment, scattering the gulls and swans. Some visitors, inevitably, would ignore the warnings about venturing too close to speeding trucks or angry picketers. Your guide, Bud Selig, might from time to time motion for the group to hush, cupping his ear: “Listen,” he would whisper, as the sound of lacerating sarcasm wafted from a distant window. “Sixth-graders.”

Summertime expeditions into a zone-free zone could become an essential part of growing up, as enlightened parents from Cambridge to Berkeley sought a broadening experience for their young—an immersion (camp brochures will say) in that “single torrent” of collective life evoked by Ariès. It is vitally important to instill a sense of historical perspective in the young. Children, after all, represent what society is going to become. ■

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

PREVIEW



JAZZ

Ted Nash's

Sidewalk Meeting

POPULAR MUSIC

New Insight from

Punk's Left Wing

FILM

Hedwig and the

Search for

Romantic Completion

CLASSICAL

Deborah Voigt

Sings *Salome*

DANCE

Summer Distractions

in the Big Apple

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POPULAR MUSIC & JAZZ

by Bob Blumenthal and Charles M. Young

COLLECTIVE EFFORT

For the past decade, some of the most original and intriguing sounds to be heard in New York jazz circles have emanated from the Jazz Composers Collective. This non-profit alliance of the bassist Ben Allison, the pianist Frank Kimbrough, the saxophonists Michael Blake and Ted Nash, and others has produced a series of concerts that feature the members' own music and diverse ensembles. Uncommon instrumental combinations, fresh approaches to improvisation, and an inclusive use of source materials are the collective's norm. *Sidewalk Meeting* (Arabesque), by Nash's band Odeon, is an ideal representation of the JCC aesthetic. A sextet that employs trombone or sousaphone, violin, accordion, and two drum sets, as well as Nash's saxophones and clarinets, Odeon finds

strains of tango, klezmer, New Orleans second line, and European classicism coexisting in one glorious melting pot

of affirmative sounds, rhythms, and colors. Nash recruited the singular talents of brass master Wycliffe Gordon (a former fellow member of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra), Israeli violin phenom Miri Ben-Ari, percussion dynamos Matt Wilson and Jeff Ballard, and the startlingly versatile accordion player Bill Schimmel. He then provided this talented crew with a program of atmospheric original music and invigorating arrangements of Debussy, Ellington, and Monk. *Sidewalk Meeting* continues a stellar JCC year on disc which has also seen the release of Allison's *Riding the Nuclear Tiger* (Palmetto) and Blake's *Drift* (Intuition), with new albums by Kimbrough's quartet, Noumena, and Kimbrough and Allison's Herbie Nichols Project, soon to follow.

—B.B.



NEWPORT BLUES

The mecca of roots music when country blues got rediscovered in the late fifties and early sixties, the Newport Folk Festival attracted a lot of really old blues singers who hadn't recorded or even performed much since the thirties. Everyone except Mississippi John Hurt was amazed to discover that Mississippi John Hurt was still alive, not to mention Skip James, Bukka White, and a host of other extravagantly talented and nearly forgotten artists who promptly performed at Newport and found a new place in the sun. *Newport Folk Festival, Best of the Blues 1959-68* (Vanguard), a three-disc anthology, presents fifty-one songs by eighteen performers who are obviously thrilled to have an audience that is equally obviously thrilled to hear them. Radiating humility and a sly sense of humor, Hurt had an almost saintly presence, while Son House and the Reverend Gary Davis truly howled the blues. Best known as the composer of "I'm So Glad," made famous by Cream during the psychedelic era, James had an eerie tenor, at once terrifying and hypnotic. Lightnin' Hopkins and John Lee Hooker both added an element of boogie to the blues. Muddy Waters demonstrated that he could leave his electric band behind in Chicago and knock out an audience with just one acoustic guitar. In fact, almost all the artists here do that: just one guitar and one voice, each amazingly varied within the strictures of a simple musical form that can still entrance.

—C.M.Y.

BOB BLUMENTHAL IS A JAZZ CRITIC FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE. CHARLES M. YOUNG REVIEWS MUSIC FOR PLAYBOY AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS AND FOR ALLMUSIC.COM.

ACTIVISM'S SOUNDTRACK

Punks come in all shapes, sizes, and political beliefs, sharing only a militant commitment to widely varying interpretations of libertarianism and individualism. Vying to carry the long-fallen banner of the Dead Kennedys on punk's left wing, Anti-Flag takes its musical cues from the generation of English bands that arose after the Sex Pistols. In other words, they are fast, tight, melodic, and extremely listenable for fans of raucous rock and roll. Politically, they've grown less vague in their idealism and more specific in their anarchism on their third album, *Underground Network* (Fat Wreck). Quoting such antihierarchical heroes as Noam Chomsky (the MIT linguist) and Howard Zinn (author of *A People's History of the United States*) in their liner notes, they attack the education system, the corporate media, and the military in their songs. They also provide some insight into the history of Pittsburgh's punk subculture, with "Spaz's House Destruction Party," in which they reminisce fondly about a friend who received an eviction notice and decided to throw a three-day party, leaving the landlord almost nothing to rent to the next tenants. Quoting a sticker on Woody Guthrie's guitar for the song "This Machine Kills Fascists," they demand that right-wing punks get out of the scene, accusing them of fomenting violence at shows and just being stupid. Relentlessly on the road since forming in 1994, and having opened for rock's most prominent revolutionary band, Rage Against the Machine, during the *Battle of Los Angeles* tour last year, Anti-Flag provides an invigorating soundtrack to the great revival of activism currently sweeping America's campuses. Watch for them at your next anti-WTO protest.

—C.M.Y.

FILM

by Ella Taylor

POWELL'S POETRY

The story goes that Winston Churchill, after seeing Michael Powell's 1943 film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*—and taking it, doubtless correctly, as a political attack on himself—fumed that this time, that Powell fellow had gone too far. To which Powell, one of Britain's finest filmmakers and a hero to the best among today's directors, from Mike Leigh to Martin Scorsese, sweetly responded that he thought that was the whole idea. As anyone who has seen *Black Narcissus* (1947), *The Red Shoes* (1948), or *Peeping Tom* (1960) knows, going too far was Powell's credo. Though his visual style hardly seems over the top by today's goose-'em-or-lose-'em standards, his images harbor a dazzling emotional intensity without benefit of special effects. Now the boutique art-house

distributor Milestone Film & Video, which already deserves a medal for restoring and recirculating such lost classics as Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba* and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma*, has released to video Powell's gorgeous 1937 first feature, *The Edge of the World* (beautifully restored by the British Film Institute), the story of two clans torn apart in a tiny Scottish Isles crofting community. As always in Powell's movies, people go to exhilaratingly absurd extremes for love, or at least for their lives' passion. In this case, two insanely heroic—and, by all commonsense criteria, pointless—attempts to scale an impossibly sheer cliff at the edge of perennially stormy seas end in private tragedy; this is compounded by the consequences for the villagers (played by themselves and a

wonderful cast featuring John Laurie, Finlay Currie, and Belle Chrystall), who are already taxed beyond endurance by the harsh conditions under which they live. As much as it is about the vital durability of love, *The Edge of the World* is also the story of the death of an era. (It's hard to believe that the Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier wasn't inspired by this film's austere black-and-white lyricism to make his own wildly romantic melodrama, *Breaking the Waves*.) "Don't tell anyone—I'm a poet," an impishly immodest Powell remarks to the camera in a charming 1978 documentary postscript to the film, in which he goes back to the location, the island of St. Kilda, with his crew. No need to tell; it's all right there on the screen. (800-603-1104; \$29.95 plus shipping.)

HANSEL & HEDWIG

For a movie described by its writer and director, John Cameron Mitchell, as "a post-punk neo-glam rock musical" inspired by a Platonic myth, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is marvelously accessible, without in the least resorting to the cuddly mainstreaming that has defanged so much of contemporary gay film. Based on Mitchell's critically lauded off-Broadway stage show, the movie stars the bitchily charismatic Mitchell as



JOHN CAMERON MITCHELL STARS IN *HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH*

"internationally ignored" drag artist Hedwig, who tours the enchantingly named Bilgewater chain of restaurants with his band, the better to stalk a former protégé and lover who stole his songs and became an overnight rock sensation as Tommy Gnosis (played with goofy innocence by Michael Pitt). Hedwig began life as Hansel, a lonely East German lad whose feverish imagination is fed on the one hand by the pop music he hears on the American Forces radio network, and on the other by a

bedtime story from hell, as interpreted by his draconian mother. The story, told in the movie through amusingly primitivist animation sequences, derives from Plato's tale of human origins, in which everyone had two heads, four arms, and four legs in one body until the gods, fearing the humans' power, split them in two, condemning them to walk the earth forever looking for their other halves. It is this search for romantic completion that lends *Hedwig* its universality, but Cameron is fearless about ap-

proaching it through his own arcane prism. Abandoned in a Kansas trailer by an American GI who married him on the condition that he undergo a sex-change operation (it was botched, leaving Hansel with the inch that becomes "what I have to work with"), Hansel becomes Hedwig, but his twin longings for recognition and fusion with a desired other rage unabated. As first-time directors go, Mitchell is remarkably poised

and bold with form: Hedwig's story is told in song, with an exuberant rock score composed by Stephen Trask, who also plays the bandleader Skszp. At the close, the movie drops its angry hilarity for a sublimely enigmatic grace note, at once wistful and hopeful, in which we see Hedwig, stripped of all her finery, padding tentatively down a rain-soaked street to a headily uncertain destiny.

ELLA TAYLOR IS A FILM CRITIC FOR *LA WEEKLY*.

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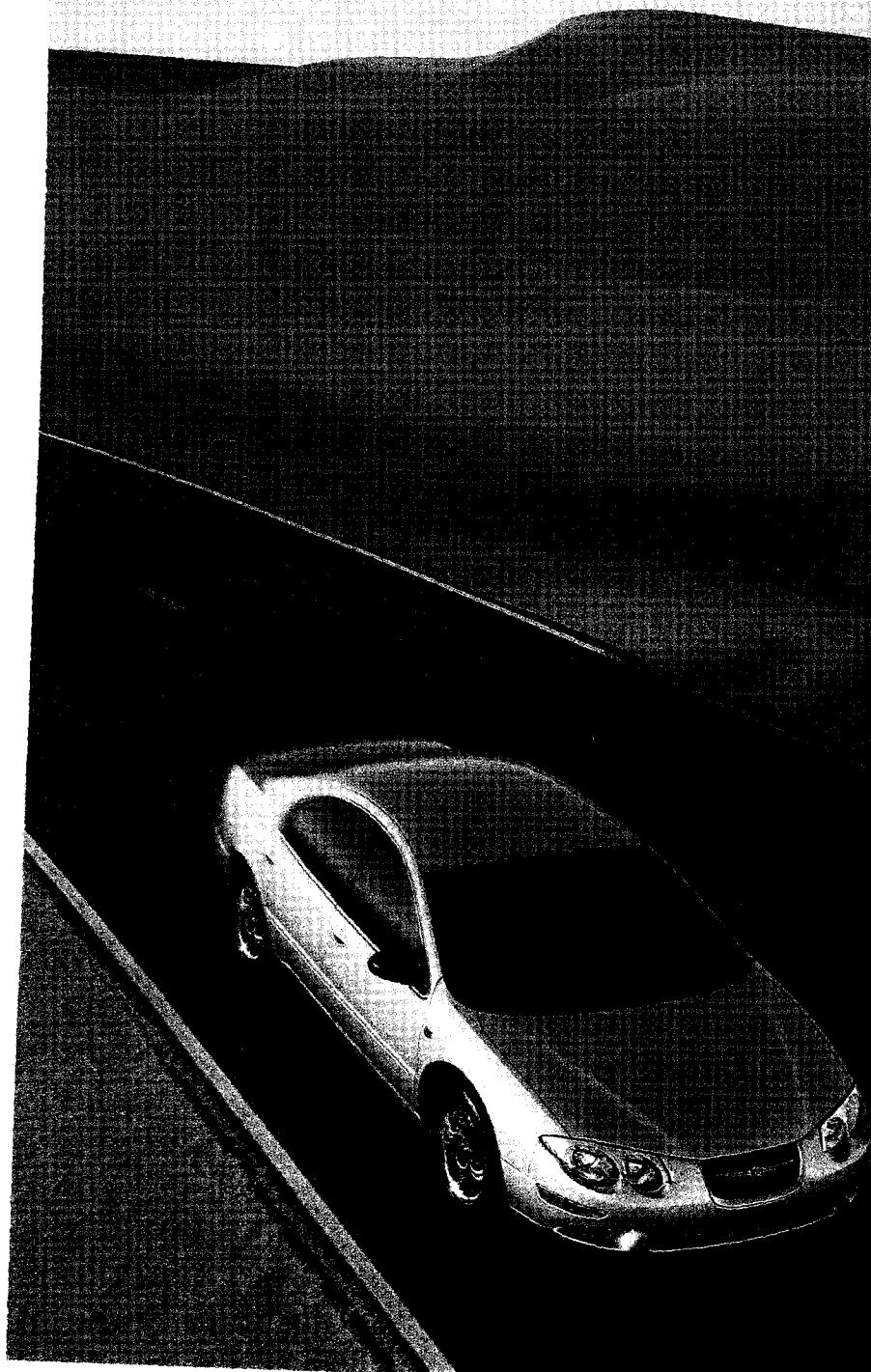


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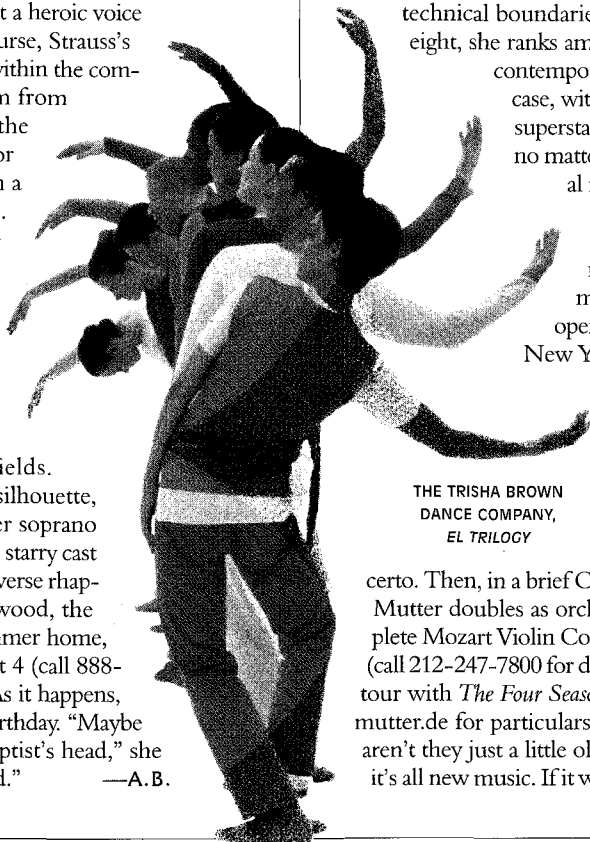
CLASSICAL MUSIC & DANCE

by Austin Baer and Nancy Dalva

SIXTEEN-PLUS CANDLES

So far, the heroine Richard Strauss envisioned for *Salome* has never materialized outside his imagination. All the composer hoped for was "a 16-year-old princess with the voice of an Isolde," his point of reference being one of the longest, most tempestuous, yet most radiant and tender parts in the canon of Wagner, dangerous—even ruinous—for any but a heroic voice in full maturity. Emotionally, of course, Strauss's clangorous biblical shocker is well within the compass of an adolescent. Set verbatim from Oscar Wilde's play, it centers on the passion of Herod's stepdaughter for John the Baptist, who languishes in a cistern, hurling baleful prophecies. When saint and sinner meet in the moonlight, he recoils at her advances, but before the night is out, she is showering kisses on his severed head: her reward (on a silver platter) for the striptease known as the Dance of the Seven Veils. Aghast, Herod orders the girl crushed beneath his soldiers' shields. Deborah Voigt lacks the ballerina silhouette, but the thrust and sweetness of her soprano are what will count when she leads a starry cast in a concert performance of this perverse rhapsody of love and death, at Tanglewood, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's summer home, in Lenox, Massachusetts, on August 4 (call 888-266-1200). Seiji Ozawa conducts. As it happens, the date marks Voigt's forty-first birthday. "Maybe they'll put a candle in John the Baptist's head," she hopes. "That would be really twisted."

—A.B.



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A RETURN TO THE CLASSICS

To the German violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, former child prodigy, the unexamined score is not worth playing. As a youngster, it is true, she devoted herself exclusively to the classic cornerstones. But as a young adult, she started broadening her palette, inspiring a distinguished list of composers to push the poetic and technical boundaries of the violin. At the age of thirty-eight, she ranks among the most impassioned muses of contemporary music—a role compatible, in her case, with that of the glamorous international superstar, aflame with the spirit of exploration no matter the terrain. Last year, in a millennial mood, Mutter concentrated on milestones of the twentieth century. Now, in the sort of about-face that keeps revitalizing her art, she returns to the most unassailable of the classics. In the opening concerts of the new season at the New York Philharmonic, under the direction of Kurt Masur (September 20 and 22; 212-721-6500), and in subscription concerts with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, under Mariss Jansons (September 28 and 29; 412-392-4900), she reclaims the Beethoven Violin Concerto. Then, in a brief Carnegie Hall residency in November, Mutter doubles as orchestra leader and soloist in the complete Mozart Violin Concertos and Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* (call 212-247-7800 for details). An eight-city North American tour with *The Four Seasons* follows (visit www.anne-sophie-mutter.de for particulars). Beethoven, Mozart, Vivaldi—say, aren't they just a little old hat? Not really. In Mutter's hands, it's all new music. If it weren't, she wouldn't play it.

—A.B.

SUMMER IN THE CITY

Although we tend to associate summer festivals with charming small cities or rustic retreats, the urban allure of the Lincoln Center Festival is truly nonpareil. Hot night, summer in the city! Strolling across the busy plaza while the sky is still light, passing from the pavement's heat into a deliciously air-conditioned theater, all winter plush and gilt, feels almost sinfully transformative. Later, exiting into the dark to the exhilarating sounds of a swing band playing on a bandstand, the air is hot and cool, all at once. Coffee? drinks? ice cream?—the night teems with possibilities. Among the host of enticing events that make up Lincoln Center Festival 2001—a varied roster of excellent reasons to stay in the city or even to make it your substitute summer vacation—there is one that itself promises to be just like a midsum-

mer night: the Trisha Brown Dance Company and Dave Douglas & Ensemble, in the New York premiere of *El Trilogy* (July 18–21, at the LaGuardia Concert Hall, just west of Lincoln Center), a three-part collaboration between the sensually cerebral choreographer and the innovative jazzman. Brown's shimmering work is always hot and cool at the same time, full of riffs and re-riffs, slipping out of one thing and into another. Speaking of which, Brown also has an opera on the schedule: she's the director of Salvatore Sciarrino's *Luci mie traditrici* (July 10–14). Check the festival's Web site, at www.lincolncenter.org, or call their hotline, at 212-875-5928. —N.D.

AUSTIN BAER IS A WRITER BASED IN NEW YORK. NANCY DALVA'S ESSAYS APPEAR IN THE MAGAZINE *2WICE*.

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NOTES & DISPATCHES

PARIS

A FRENCH FOURTH

*The challenge of raising
expatriated children*

.....

Along about this time every year, as Independence Day approaches, I pull an old American flag out of a bottom drawer where it is folded away—folded in a square, I admit, not the regulation triangle. I've had it a long time and have always flown it outside on July 4. Here in Paris it hangs from a fourth-floor balcony visible from the street. I've never seen anyone look up, but in my mind's eye an American tourist may notice it and smile, and a French passerby may be reminded of the date and the occasion that prompts its appearance. I hope so.

For my expatriated family, too, the flag is meaningful, in part because we don't do anything else to celebrate the Fourth. People don't have barbecues in Paris apartments, and most other Americans I know who have settled here suppress such outward signs of their heritage—or they go back home for the summer to refuel.

Our children think the flag-hanging is a cool thing, and I like it because it gives us a few moments of family Q&A about our citizenship. My wife and I have been away from the United States for nine years, and our children are eleven and nine, so American history is mostly something they have learned—or haven't learned—from their parents. July 4 is one of the times when the American in me feels a twinge of unease about the great lacunae in our children's understanding of who they are and is prompted to try to fill the gaps. It's also a time, one among many, when my thoughts turn more generally to the costs and benefits of raising children in a foreign culture.

Louise and Henry speak French fluently; they are taught in French at school, and most of their friends are French. They move from language to language, seldom mixing them up, without effort or even awareness. This is a wonderful thing, of course. And our physical separation from our native land is not much of an issue. My wife and I are grateful every day for all that our children are *not* exposed to. American school shootings are a good object lesson for our children in the follies of the society we hold at a distance.



Naturally, we also want to remind them of reasons to take pride in being American and to try to convey to them what that means. It is a difficult thing to do from afar, and the distance seems more than just a matter of miles. I sometimes think that the stories we tell them must seem like Aesop's (or La Fontaine's) fables, myths with no fixed place in space or time. Still, connections can be made, lessons learned.

During a period of early experimentation with truth and untruth Henry became fascinated by the tale of George Washington's chopping down the cherry tree. Several years ago

a thoughtful godparent gave the kids a series of wonderful short biographies of various American figures: Amelia Earhart, Jackie Robinson, Abraham Lincoln. The books have allowed us to trace a little of American history and to preach the virtues of American-style courage.

Last summer we spent a week with my brother and his family, who live in Concord, Massachusetts, and we took the children to the North Bridge to give them a glimpse of the American Revolution. We happened to run across a re-enactment of the skirmish that launched the war, with everyone dressed up in three-cornered hats and cotton bonnets. This probably only confirmed to our goggle-eyed kids the make-believe quality of American history.

Six months later, when we were recalling the experience at the family dinner table here, I asked Louise what the Revolution had been about. She thought that it had something to do with the man who rode his horse from town to town. Ah, I said, satisfaction welling in my breast, and what was that man's name? "Gulliver?" Louise replied. Henry, for his part, knew that the Revolution was between the British and the Americans, and thought that it was probably about slavery.

As we pursued this conversation, though, we learned what the children knew instead. Louise told us that the French Revolution came at the end of the Enlightenment, when people learned a lot of ideas, and one was that they didn't need kings to tell them what to think or do. On another occasion, when Henry asked what makes a person a "junior" or a "II" or a "III," Louise helped me answer by bringing up kings like Louis Quatorze and Quinze and Seize; Henry riposted with Henry VIII.

I can't say I worry much about our

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVE BRODNER

children's European frame of reference. There will be plenty of time for them to learn America's pitifully brief history and to find out who Thomas Jefferson and Franklin Roosevelt were. Already they know a great deal more than I would have wished about Bill Clinton.

If all of this resonates with me, it may be because my family moved to Paris in 1954, when I was three, and I was enrolled in French schools for most of my grade-school years. I don't remember much instruction in American studies at school or at home. I do remember that my mother took me out of school one afternoon to see the movie *Oklahoma!* I can recall what a far-away place it seemed: all that sunshine and square dancing and surreys with fringe on top. The sinister Jud Fry personified evil for me for quite some time afterward. Cowboys and Indians were an American cliché that had already reached Paris through the movies, and I asked a grandparent to send me a Davy Crockett hat so that I could live out that fairy tale against the backdrop of gray postwar Montparnasse.

Although my children are living in the same place at roughly the same time in their lives, their experience as expatriates is very different from mine. The particular narratives of American history aside, American culture is not theirs alone but that of their French classmates, too (as is Japanese culture, as embodied in Pokémon). The music they listen to is either "American" or "European," but it is often hard to tell the difference. In my day little French kids looked like nothing other than little French kids (we wore blue smocks in school); but Louise and Henry and their classmates dress much as their peers in the United States do, though with perhaps less Lands' End fleeciness. When I returned to visit the United States in the 1950s, it was a five-day ocean crossing for a month's home leave every two years; now we fly over for a week or two, although not very often. Virtually every imaginable product available to my children's American cousins is now obtainable here.

If time and globalization have made France much more like the United States

than it was in my youth, then I can conclude a couple of things. On one hand, our children are confronting a much less jarring cultural divide than I did, and they have far more access to their native culture. Re-entry, when it comes, is likely to be smoother. On the other hand, they are less than fully immersed in a truly foreign world. That experience no longer seems possible in Western countries—a sad development, in my view.

Last spring Louise was in a fourth-grade bilingual "spectacle" about American history that was intended to help the class prepare for a three-week trip to the United States, where students would live with American families and attend school in a typical American town—Clinton, New York, as it happened. The play, written by their teachers, gave Louise and her classmates a distinctively French gloss on the American story, beginning with the settling of North America by Indians crossing the Bering Strait and fast-forwarding to the continent's rediscovery when the French King François I dispatched Jacques Cartier to explore North America. Then came the Boston Tea Party. The Civil War was a solemn affair. The Indians were subjected to genocide. Two world wars occurred. The close of the saga portrayed the era of *Grease*; Louise was typecast as the blonde lead, Sandy, and lip-synched a song about summer nights in a place as remote to her as Oklahoma was to me.

As the trip approached, my family was in the final stages of deciding whether to stay in Paris or move back to the United States. Louise worried openly about her ignorance of things American and about the possibility of falling hopelessly behind, so she favored going "home" to the United States. I worried privately that her exposure to idyllic small-town America might make a decision to stay in Paris, my preferred course, a harder sell. But it worked the other way around. Louise had a wonderful, memorable time in upstate New York. She came back to the familiar world of Paris with her curiosity satisfied, content to stay here a while longer. And so it came to pass. —CHARLES TRUEHEART

BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

FOULED OUT

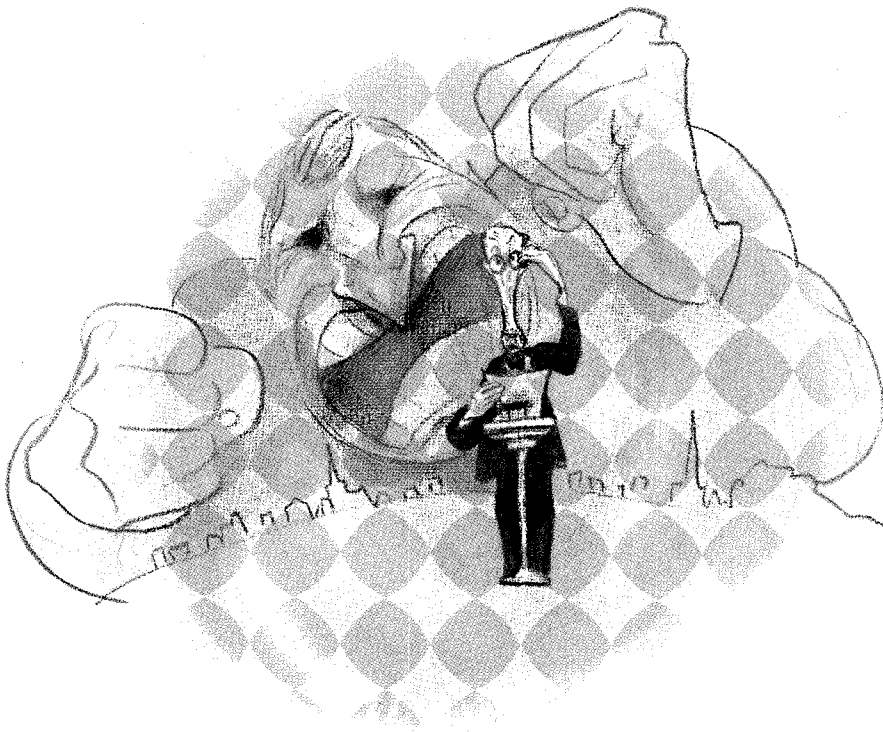
The story of a professor forced, because of his views on Bobby Knight, to act like a marked man

.....

When spring-term classes began at Indiana University last January, Murray Sperber was understandably on edge. Sperber has taught English and American studies at the university for nearly three decades, and until recently his life followed the generally peaceful contours of a scholarly existence. Dropping in on one of his classes, one might find him analyzing the language in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* or discussing the social impact of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Owing to his role in a recent campus controversy, however, Sperber has lately been feeling less like a professor of literature than like a man on a hit list.

On the advice of campus security, Sperber carries a cell phone programmed to contact the police at the touch of a single button. He was urged to enroll in a self-defense course at the local police academy (he is taking judo) and was also trained by the police in "verbal judo"—methods for defusing verbal confrontations so that they don't turn into physical ones. He was advised to avoid letting his whereabouts be known. His spring-term courses—one on post-World War II American literature, and one on the modern media—were listed in the university catalogue under other faculty members' names. (Students who enrolled were baffled on the first day of class by the sight of him; many thought they had misread the room number.) Sperber declines to hold office hours and will meet with students only in public places.

Sperber's troubles began on March 15 of last year, when he appeared on a CNN/Sports Illustrated television exposé about Bobby Knight, the legendary basketball coach whose success on the court (three National Collegiate Athletic Association championships and eleven Big Ten titles since joining



Indiana University, in 1971) had led virtually everyone at the school to overlook his tyrannical behavior. But Sperber also happens to be one of the country's most outspoken critics of college sports, a subject he has examined in several books. So he had welcomed the opportunity to speak to CNN/SI about the now famous complaints about Knight: that he had a penchant for wild, expletive-filled tirades, and that he had once tried to choke a player.

Asked what would happen if he himself were to behave this way in a classroom, Sperber said that he would almost certainly lose his tenure. What would happen to Knight? Bobby Knight was "the emperor of Indiana," Sperber replied; no one would hold him accountable. Indeed, the day before, Indiana University had held a press conference to defend Knight in advance.

In Indiana, of course, few things are taken more seriously than basketball, and Sperber's remarks constituted a transgression that many considered unforgivable. The following morning he awoke to a torrent of irate and obscene telephone calls and e-mails. "Shame on you for giving such a wonderful university a black eye ... You should resign!" read one e-mail, from an Indiana Uni-

versity alumnus. "You are a vile and pathetic little worm," another said. Anonymous callers flooded Sperber's answering machine with vituperative messages. Disparaging letters began appearing in the local paper.

Initially, Sperber was right about Bobby Knight's inviolability. Even after CNN/SI obtained and aired footage of the choking incident, the university allowed Knight to keep his job, although it fined him \$30,000, suspended him for three games, and imposed a "zero tolerance" policy with respect to any future incidents. Sperber continued to speak out on the issue, and the angry missives from Indiana fans took on an increasingly threatening tone. "If you don't shut up, I'll shut you up," one caller warned. Sperber soon noticed that the schedule for his fall classes had been posted on a Web site for Indiana University basketball fans. "I see dead bodies," a heading on the site declared; it was followed by a list that included Sperber's name and those of two newspaper columnists who had also been critical of Knight.

Strangers began approaching Sperber in supermarkets and coffee shops and warning him to stop talking about Knight. Others shouted at him as they drove by his house or passed him on the street. "You're that fucking pro-

fessor who won't keep his mouth shut!" a student yelled from across a parking lot one day; Sperber changed direction in order to avoid a physical confrontation. Another man rolled down his car window and swore at Sperber as he stood on a street corner with his ten-year-old foster daughter, waiting for the light to change. Sperber began fearing for the safety of his family. They stopped going to restaurants, tired of the icy, intimidating glares they drew from other diners. His wife stopped using her credit card after a store clerk, recognizing her last name, verbally harassed her.

Sperber started having nightmares and losing sleep. He could barely concentrate on his work. Arriving at his office one day, he was greeted by a message on his answering machine from a man who listed the days and times of Sperber's classes and warned, "I know how to find you." The campus police offered to post an armed guard in Sperber's lecture rooms. But, exhausted by the threats and the pressure, and feeling that he could not teach under such conditions, Sperber decided to take an unpaid leave. On June 20 he left Bloomington for Montreal, where he was born and raised, and where nobody much cared about Bobby Knight.

A few months ago I met Sperber for dinner in Bloomington. He was back because Knight was gone: last September, after Knight upbraided a student and committed other violations, he was fired. (He has since been hired by Texas Tech University.) His dismissal sparked an uproar on campus, but that eventually died down, and Sperber decided it was more or less safe to return.

When we got together, he seemed relieved by Knight's departure but was visibly worn by events. "The die-hard Knight fans are still out there," he told me wearily. "They still post messages whenever I speak publicly." Several times each day he logs onto various Indiana-fan Web sites to see if any new threats have been posted. "There were some denunciations today," he said. "The usual low-level 'I hate this guy, why doesn't he shut up?'"



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— Oni Faida Lampley

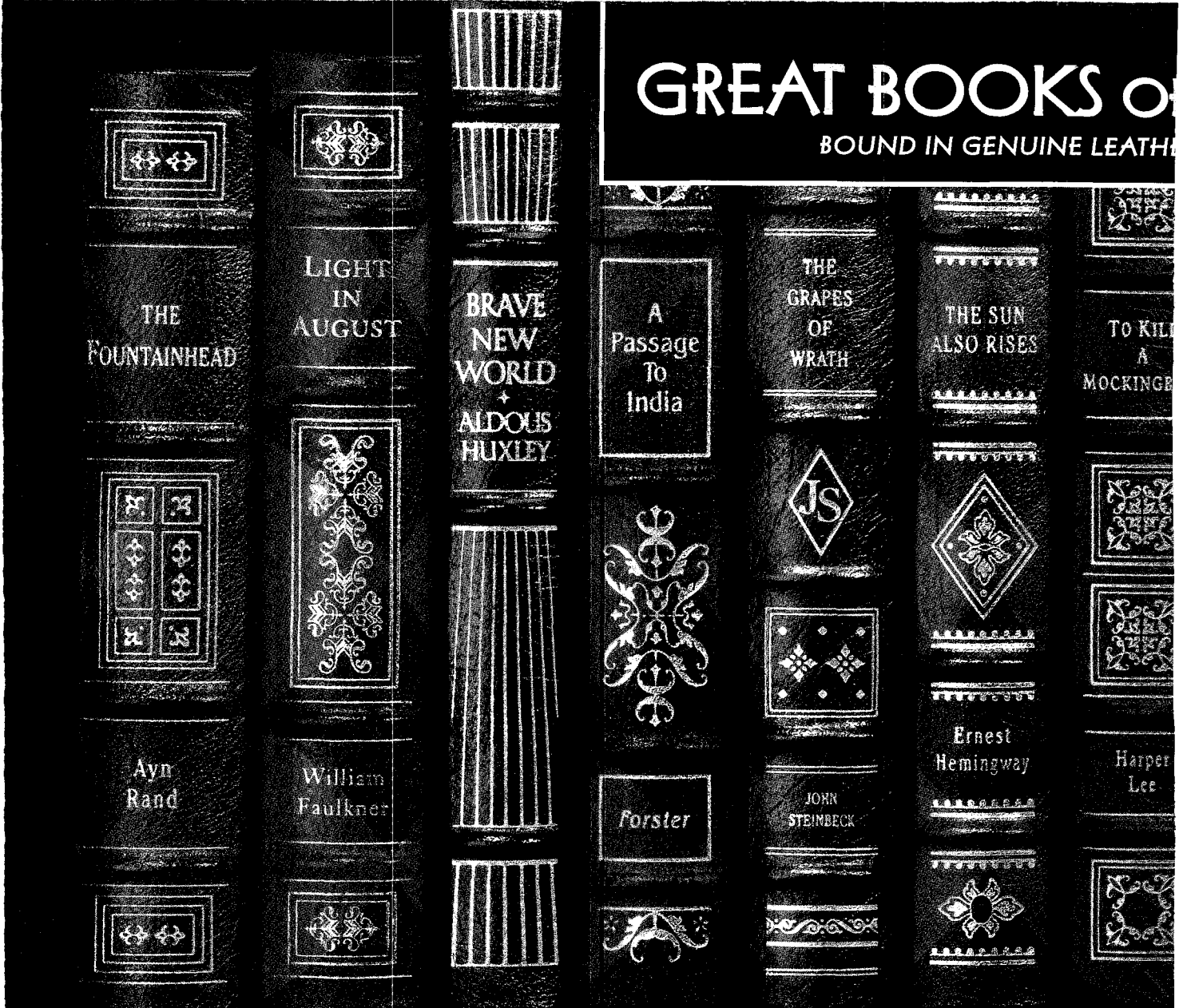
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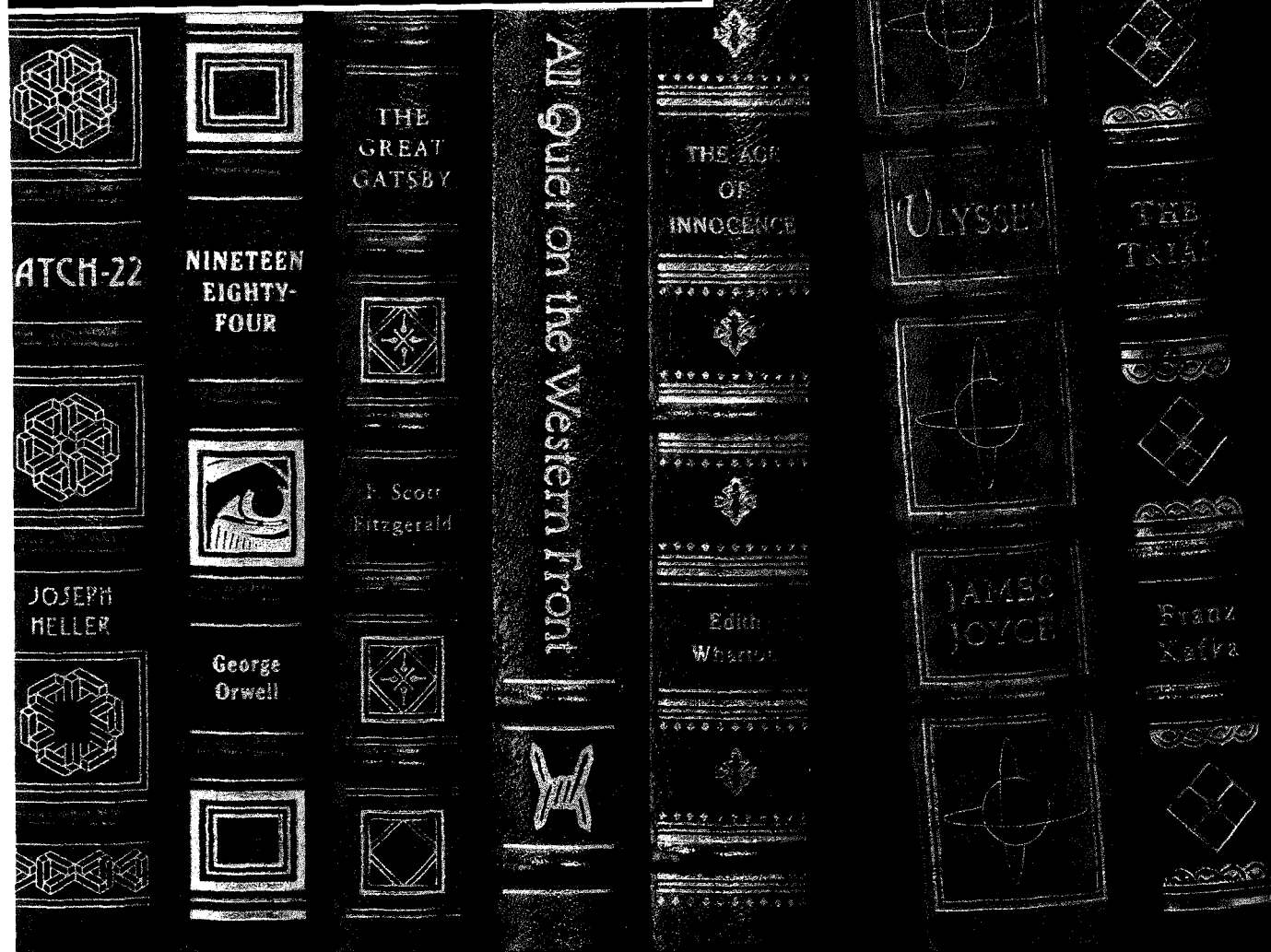
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Dressed in jeans, sneakers, and a San Francisco 49ers cap, Sperber looked nothing like the pointy-headed professor his critics often portray him as. Before becoming a professor he spent two years playing semi-professional basketball in Europe, and although an injured knee has kept him off the courts for years, he remains a fairly avid sports fan. He began writing about college athletics because of an interest in NCAA soccer.

Not surprisingly, however, Sperber's investigations of amateur athletics and especially the past year's experience have given him a somewhat jaundiced view of college sports. Again and again over the past year, he told me, people e-mailed or called him to ask, "Don't you understand that the purpose of Indiana University is the basketball team? That's what pays your salary as an English teacher!"

In fact, as Sperber points out in his latest book, *Beer and Circus: How Big-Time College Sports Is Crippling Undergraduate Education* (2000), the vast majority of athletic programs actually lose money, because expenditures for equipment, facilities, and travel generally outstrip revenues from ticket sales and TV contracts. Although a few universities have seen enrollment rise following athletic success, Sperber argues that the disproportionate focus on college sports is partly responsible for swelling class sizes and a declining emphasis on undergraduate education. A graduate of Purdue University, where, he says, he obtained an excellent education forty years ago, Sperber believes that the problem is particularly bad at public universities, where the beer-soaked, sports-oriented party scene prevails.

Some fellow critics of college sports would debate this proposition. In their provocative book *The Game of Life: College Sports and Educational Values* (2001), James Shulman and William Bowen argue that the impact of sports is in some ways greater at Ivy League universities and small liberal-arts schools, where the proportion of athletes in the student population is higher than at big public universities. Sperber is unconvinced. At schools like Swarthmore and Williams, he says,

most students still receive a quality education, and sports do not play a remotely comparable role in shaping the culture.

The day after our dinner I sat in on one of Sperber's classes. Toward the end he left the room, and the conversation turned to his situation. Several students told me that their friends still express horror at even the mention of their professor's name. A few admitted that at the start of the semester they

had shared this reaction and had considered dropping the course. (Only one student actually did so.) But for all his public outspokenness, the students said, Sperber almost never mentioned Knight or his own role in the controversy during class. They seemed to appreciate this. They had come to think of Sperber not as Bobby Knight's critic but as an ordinary professor—which is, of course, what he is hoping to become once again. —EYAL PRESS

PESHAWAR

THE COUNTERTERRORIST MYTH

A former CIA operative explains why the terrorist Usama bin Ladin has little to fear from American intelligence

.....

The United States has spent billions of dollars on counterterrorism since the U.S. embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya, in August of 1998. Tens of millions have been spent on covert operations specifically targeting Usama bin Ladin and his terrorist organization, al-Qa'ida. Senior U.S. officials boldly claim—even after the suicide attack last October on the USS *Cole*, in the port of Aden—that the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are clandestinely "picking apart" bin Ladin's organization "limb by limb." But having worked for the CIA for nearly nine years on Middle Eastern matters (I left the Directorate of Operations because of frustration with the Agency's many problems), I would argue that America's counterterrorism program in the Middle East and its environs is a myth.

Peshawar, the capital of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier, is on the cultural periphery of the Middle East. It is just down the Grand Trunk Road from the legendary Khyber Pass, the gateway to Afghanistan. Peshawar is where bin Ladin cut his teeth in the Islamic *jihad*, when, in the mid-1980s, he became the financier and logistics man for the Maktab al-Khidamat, The Office of Services, an overt organization trying to recruit and aid Muslim, chiefly Arab, volunteers for the war against the Soviets in

Afghanistan. The friendships and associations made in The Office of Services gave birth to the clandestine al-Qa'ida, The Base, whose explicit aim is to wage a *jihad* against the West, especially the United States.

According to Afghan contacts and Pakistani officials, bin Ladin's men regularly move through Peshawar and use it as a hub for phone, fax, and modem communication with the outside world. Members of the embassy-bombing teams in Africa probably planned to flee back to Pakistan. Once there they would likely have made their way into bin Ladin's open arms through al-Qa'ida's numerous friends in Peshawar. Every tribe and region of Afghanistan is represented in this city, which is dominated by the Pathans, the pre-eminent tribe in the Northwest Frontier and southern Afghanistan. Peshawar is also a power base of the Taliban, Afghanistan's fundamentalist rulers. Knowing the city's ins and outs would be indispensable to any U.S. effort to capture or kill bin Ladin and his closest associates. Intelligence collection on al-Qa'ida can't be of much real value unless the agent network covers Peshawar.

During a recent visit, at sunset, when the city's cloistered alleys go black except for an occasional flashing neon sign, I would walk through Afghan neighborhoods. Even in the

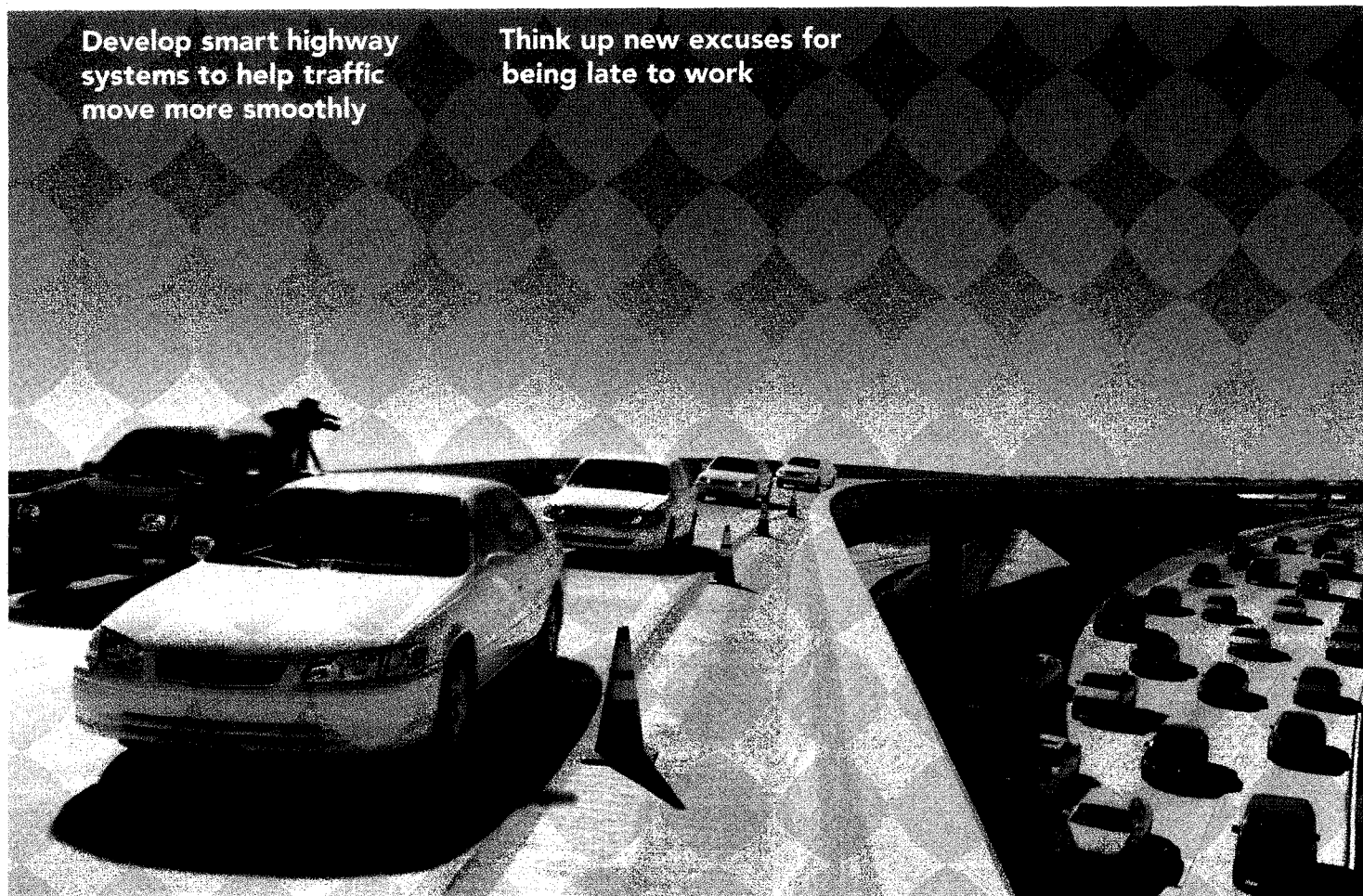
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darkness I had a case officer's worst sensation—eyes following me everywhere. To escape the crowds I would pop into carpet, copper, and jewelry shops and every cybercafé I could find. These were poorly lit one- or two-room walk-ups where young men surfed Western porn. No matter where I went, the feeling never left me. I couldn't see how the CIA as it is today had any chance of running a successful counterterrorist operation against bin Ladin in Peshawar, the Dodge City of Central Asia.

Westerners cannot visit the cinder-block, mud-brick side of the Muslim world—whence bin Ladin's foot soldiers mostly come—without announcing who they are. No case officer stationed in Pakistan can penetrate either the Afghan communities in Peshawar or the Northwest Frontier's numerous religious schools, which feed manpower and ideas to bin Ladin and the Taliban, and seriously expect to gather useful information about radical Islamic terrorism—let alone recruit foreign agents.

Even a Muslim CIA officer with native-language abilities (and the Agency, according to several active-duty case officers, has very few operatives from Middle Eastern backgrounds) could do little more in this environment than a blond, blue-eyed all-American. Case officers cannot long escape the embassies and consulates in which they serve. A U.S. official overseas, photographed and registered with the local intelligence and security services, can't travel much, particularly in a police-rich country like Pakistan, without the "host" services' knowing about it. An officer who tries to go native, pretending to be a true-believing radical Muslim searching for brothers in the cause, will make a fool of himself quickly.

In Pakistan, where the government's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency and the ruling army are competent and tough, the CIA can do little if these institutions are against it. And they are against it. Where the Taliban and Usama bin Ladin are concerned, Pakistan and the United States aren't allies. Relations between the two countries have been

poor for years, owing to American opposition to Pakistan's successful nuclear-weapons program and, more recently, Islamabad's backing of Muslim Kashmiri separatists. Bin Ladin's presence in Afghanistan as a "guest" of the Pakistani-backed Taliban has injected even more distrust and suspicion into the relationship.

In other words, American intelligence has not gained and will not gain Pakistan's assistance in its pursuit of bin Ladin. The only effective way to run offensive counterterrorist operations against Islamic radicals in more



or less hostile territory is with "non-official-cover" officers—operatives who are in no way openly attached to the U.S. government. Imagine James Bond minus the gadgets, the women, the Walther PPK, and the Aston Martin. But as of late 1999 no program to insert NOCs into an Islamic fundamentalist organization abroad had been implemented, according to one such officer who has served in the Middle East. "NOCs haven't really changed at all since the Cold War," he told me recently. "We're still a group of fake

businessmen who live in big houses overseas. We don't go to mosques and pray."

A former senior Near East Division operative says, "The CIA probably doesn't have a single truly qualified Arabic-speaking officer of Middle Eastern background who can play a believable Muslim fundamentalist who would volunteer to spend years of his life with shitty food and no women in the mountains of Afghanistan. For Christ's sake, most case officers live in the suburbs of Virginia. We don't do that kind of thing." A younger case officer boils the problem down even further: "Operations that include diarrhea as a way of life don't happen."

Behind-the-lines counterterrorism operations are just too dangerous for CIA officers to participate in directly. When I was in the Directorate of Operations, the Agency would deploy a small army of officers for a meeting with a *possibly* dangerous foreigner if he couldn't be met in the safety of a U.S. embassy or consulate. Officers still in the clandestine service say that the Agency's risk-averse, bureaucratic nature—which mirrors, of course, the growing physical risk-aversion of American society—has only gotten worse.

A few miles from Peshawar's central bazaar, near the old Cantonment, where redcoats once drilled and where the U.S. consulate can be found, is the American Club, a traditional hangout for international-aid workers, diplomats, journalists, and spooks. Worn-out Western travelers often stop here on the way from Afghanistan to decompress; one can buy a drink, watch videos, order a steak. Security warnings from the American embassy are posted on the club's hallway bulletin board.

The bulletins I saw last December advised U.S. officials and their families to stay away from crowds, mosques, and anyplace else devout Pakistanis and Afghans might gather. The U.S. embassy in Islamabad, a fortress surrounded by roadblocks, Pakistani soldiers, and walls topped with security cameras and razor wire, strongly recommended a low profile—essentially

life within the Westernized, high-walled Cantonment area or other spots where diplomats are unlikely to bump into fundamentalists.

Such warnings accurately reflect the mentality inside both the Department of State and the CIA. Individual officers may venture out, but their curiosity isn't encouraged or rewarded. Unless one of bin Ladin's foot soldiers walks through the door of a U.S. consulate or embassy, the odds that a CIA counterterrorist officer will ever see one are extremely poor.

The Directorate of Operations' history of success has done little to prepare the CIA for its confrontation with radical Islamic terrorism. Perhaps the DO's most memorable victory was against militant Palestinian groups in the 1970s and 1980s. The CIA could find common ground with Palestinian militants, who often drink, womanize, and spend time in nice hotels in pleasant, comfortable countries. Still, its "penetrations" of the PLO—delightfully and kindly rendered in David Ignatius's novel *Agents of Innocence* (1987)—were essentially emissaries from Yasir Arafat to the U.S. government.

Difficulties with fundamentalism and mud-brick neighborhoods aside, the CIA has stubbornly refused to develop cadres of operatives specializing in one or two countries. Throughout the Soviet-Afghan war (1979–1989) the DO never developed a team of Afghan experts. The first case officer in Afghanistan to have some proficiency in an Afghan language didn't arrive until 1987, just a year and a half before the war's end. Robert Baer, one of the most talented Middle East case officers of the past twenty years (and the only operative in the 1980s to collect consistently first-rate intelligence on the Lebanese Hizbollah and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad), suggested to headquarters in the early 1990s that the CIA might want to collect intelligence on Afghanistan from the neighboring Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union.

Headquarters' reply: Too dangerous, and why bother? The Cold War there was over with the Soviet with-

drawal in 1989. Afghanistan was too far away, internecine warfare was seen as endemic, and radical Islam was an abstract idea. Afghanistan has since become the brain center and training ground for Islamic terrorism against the United States, yet the CIA's clandestine service still usually keeps officers on the Afghan account no more than two or three years.

Until October of 1999 no CIA official visited Ahmad Shah Mas'ud in Afghanistan. Mas'ud is the ruler of northeastern Afghanistan and the leader of the only force still fighting the Taliban. He was the most accomplished commander of the anti-Soviet *mujahideen* guerrillas; his army now daily confronts Arab military units that are under the banner of bin Ladin, yet no CIA case officer has yet debriefed Mas'ud's soldiers on the front lines or the Pakistani, Afghan, Chinese-Turkoman, and Arab holy warriors they've captured.

The CIA's Counterterrorism Center, which now has hundreds of employees from numerous government agencies, was the creation of Duane "Dewey" Clarridge, an extraordinarily energetic bureaucrat-spook. In less than a year in the mid-1980s Clarridge converted a three-man operation confined to one room with one TV set broadcasting CNN into a staff that rivaled the clandestine service's Near East Division for primacy in counterterrorist operations. Yet the Counterterrorism Center didn't alter the CIA's methods overseas at all. "We didn't really think about the details of operations—how we would penetrate this or that group," a former senior counterterrorist official says. "Victory for us meant that we stopped [Thomas] Twetten [the chief of the clandestine service's Near East Division] from walking all over us." In my years inside the CIA, I never once heard case officers overseas or back at headquarters discuss the ABCs of a recruitment operation against any Middle Eastern target that took a case officer far off the diplomatic and business-conference circuits. Long-term seeding operations simply didn't occur.

George Tenet, who became the director of the CIA in 1997, has repeatedly described America's counterter-



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rorist program as "robust" and in most cases successful at keeping bin Ladin's terrorists "off-balance" and anxious about their own security. The Clinton Administration's senior director for counterterrorism on the National Security Council, Richard Clarke, who has continued as the counterterrorist czar in the Bush Administration, is sure that bin Ladin and his men stay awake at night "around the campfire" in Afghanistan, "worried stiff about who we're going to get next."

If we are going to defeat Usama bin

Ladin, we need to openly side with Ahmad Shah Mas'ud, who still has a decent chance of fracturing the tribal coalition behind Taliban power. That, more effectively than any clandestine counterterrorist program in the Middle East, might eventually force al-Qa'ida's leader to flee Afghanistan, where U.S. and allied intelligence and military forces cannot reach him.

Until then, I don't think Usama bin Ladin and his allies will be losing much sleep around the campfire.

—REUEL MARC GERECHT

SINGAPORE

LOVE, SINGAPOREAN STYLE

*Faced with a graying population,
a notoriously staid government has sanctioned
an "All-Out Make-Out" campaign*

.....

During a visit two years ago to Singapore, the famously straitlaced city-state I used to consider the most uptight place in Asia, I spent an evening at a beachfront bar called Sunset Bay. I was astonished at the scene I encountered. Hip young Singaporeans in leather pants swayed, individually and in pairs, to the music of a live reggae band. Baby-faced dot-commers with two mobile phones clipped to their belts tossed down pitchers of sangria. Newly acquainted couples nuzzled and later ambled amorously out into the night. From all appearances, Singaporeans had loosened up to the point of lust in the streets.

Or maybe not. When I passed through Singapore last summer, the city was abuzz with talk about the latest fertility statistics. The country's birth rate had dropped from an average of 1.96 children per woman in 1988 to below 1.5 in 1999. The phenomenon seemed to have causes beyond the use of contraception: according to the local press, many couples were finding themselves too tired after the long Singaporean workday to have sex.

Alarmed by the statistic, Singapore's government decided to act. On August 20 Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong took up the matter in a speech broadcast on radio and TV in honor of National Day,

commemorating Singapore's emergence as an independent nation in 1965. "We must at least try to arrest the problem," Goh said. "Family adds warmth and meaning to our lives. Friends are important, but a family is indispensable." Goh announced that women would be given eight weeks of paid maternity leave after the birth of their third child (previously they were given paid leave only for their first and second children). He outlined a "baby bonus" plan, whereby the government would pay families up to the equivalent of about \$5,000 in U.S. currency over six years for a second child and up to twice that for a third. The money would be earmarked for the children's educational needs.

Singapore's government—a conservative, semi-authoritarian entity dominated since independence by the People's Action Party—has a long history of mounting enormous social-engineering campaigns. Previous crusades have included efforts to make Singaporeans flush public toilets, speak better English, and stop chewing gum. Some have had a decidedly puritanical bent: legislation over the years has eliminated the red-light district, banned most pornography, and made oral sex in certain circumstances a crime punishable by incarceration. Traditionally, after government

leaders announce a campaign, the press—which has close ties to and is strongly influenced by the state—trumpets the policy. So I wasn't surprised when, shortly after National Day, I picked up the country's normally stodgy flagship newspaper, *The Straits Times*, and came across a twelve-page special section on making babies.

The section was titled "Yes, Prime Minister! An All-Out Make-Out Guide." On one page was an article headlined "GET LUCKY SPOTS," which included tips on the best places in Singapore to have sex in a car (many married couples live with parents in cramped apartments where there is little privacy). On the opposite page a columnist exhorted Singaporean men to "rise to the occasion and do your country proud," and gave instructions on how to use newspaper and tape to cover car windows during automobile trysts. Another piece itemized the essential components of a "Make-out Kit": among other things, K-Y Jelly; Wet Ones, to "clean up, freshen up and mop up"; "favourite romantic/sexy CDs"; and "cushions, for extra padding, comfort and lift." (On the back of the insert was a full-page feature on Frankie Ong, an adult-toy salesman whose

stock includes metal-studded underwear, French ticklers, and rubber "replicas of private parts.")

In the months since Goh's announcement and the attendant publicity in the press, the government has taken several steps to further the new policy. The Prime Minister has assembled and chaired several panels on fertility. The Ministry of Community Development and Sports has begun sponsoring seminars on marital sexual intimacy. The civil service has declared that newly wed employees will receive three days of paid leave, and the state-controlled Development Bank of Singapore has shortened its work week from six days to five, presumably in part so that its employees will not be too tired to procreate.

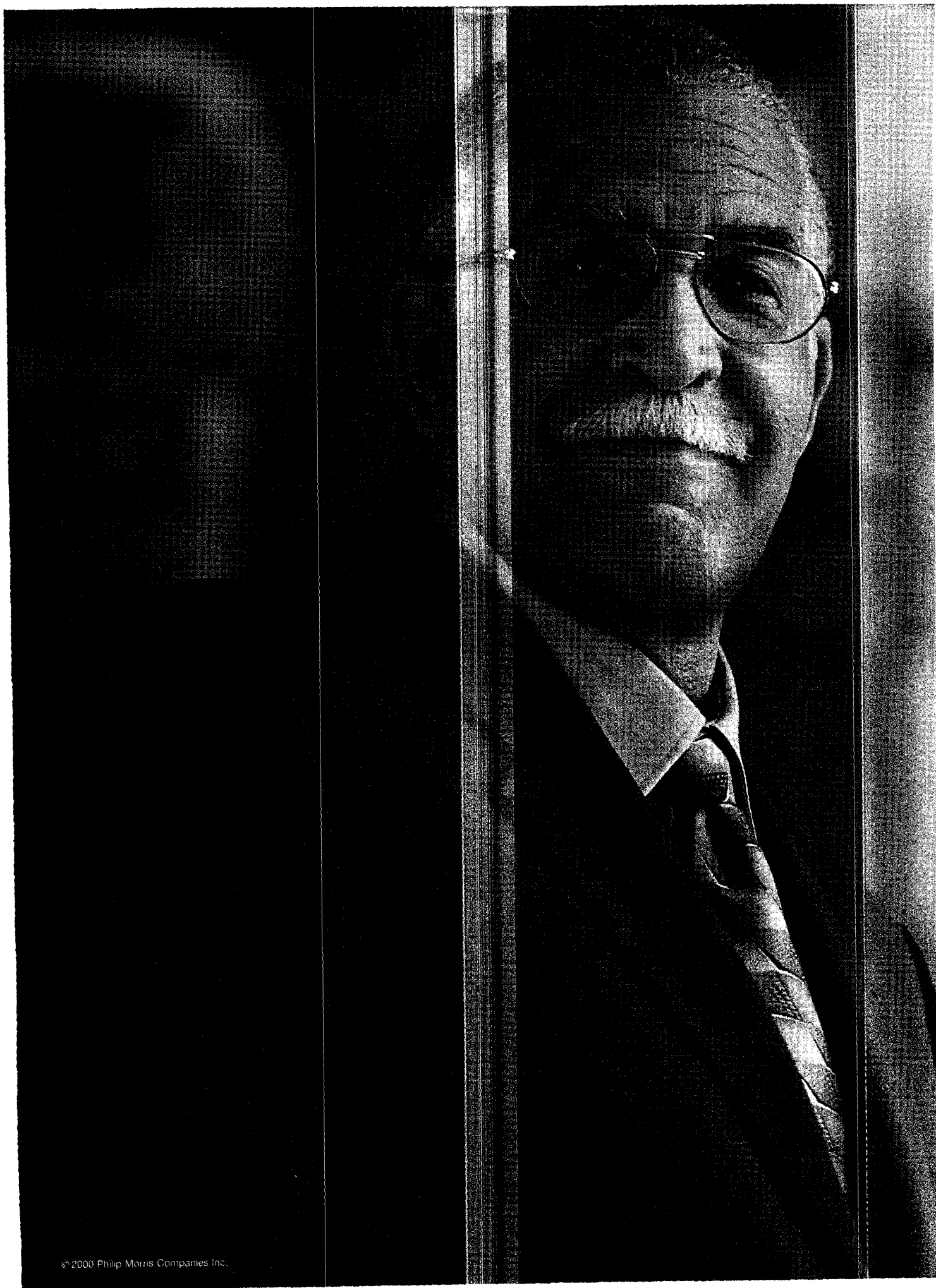
Many industrialized nations have declining birth rates, of course, but Singapore has particular reasons for concern. The city-state is surrounded by large, volatile, and sometimes unfriendly countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia; a plummeting birth rate would shrink its army (which depends on universal conscription) and could make its borders difficult to defend. In addition, James Clad, a

professor of Southeast Asian studies at Georgetown University, told me, "Singapore, and Singapore's government, reflect demographic dominance by the ethnic Chinese of the island's 4.0 million population. If birth rates of the minority Malays and South Asians continue to outpace those of the Chinese, there could be important implications someday for the composition and character of the ruling People's Action Party."

This isn't the first time that Singapore's government has tried to direct the childbearing of its citizens. In the 1960s and early 1970s, concerned about overpopulation, the state sponsored a family-planning program under the slogan "Two Is Enough." In the late 1980s, uncomfortably aware that the effort had been all too successful, it sought to raise the birth rate, but primarily among the well educated. At the same time, it adopted a series of measures, including drastically raising delivery fees in hospitals used by low-income parents, that were aimed at discouraging births among the rest of the population—measures that may help to explain the dilemma Singapore faces today.

Will the campaign work? Most people I asked don't think so. James Gomez, a Singaporean social activist, predicted in March that the new fertility-boosting measures probably won't be all that successful, because "people are very individualistic here"—a change from the first two decades following independence, when the public generally cooperated with the government's various social-engineering initiatives. Singaporeans are also increasingly attracted to the trappings of a wealthy lifestyle—the main shopping thoroughfare, Orchard Road, is lined with high-end stores such as Gucci and Prada—and may be unwilling to incur the expenses of raising additional children, even with the "baby bonus" plan. Singaporeans "can afford to have more children, but it will condemn them to living in state-provided housing instead of a condo and taking the bus instead of owning a BMW," Amit Gilboa, an American banking analyst currently living in Singapore, told me. "It's that culture of success coming back to bite." —JOSHUA KURLANTZICK





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TYBEE ISLAND, GEORGIA

THE COLONEL AND THE BOMB

*Can a forty-year-old lost Cold War
relic be brought to light?*

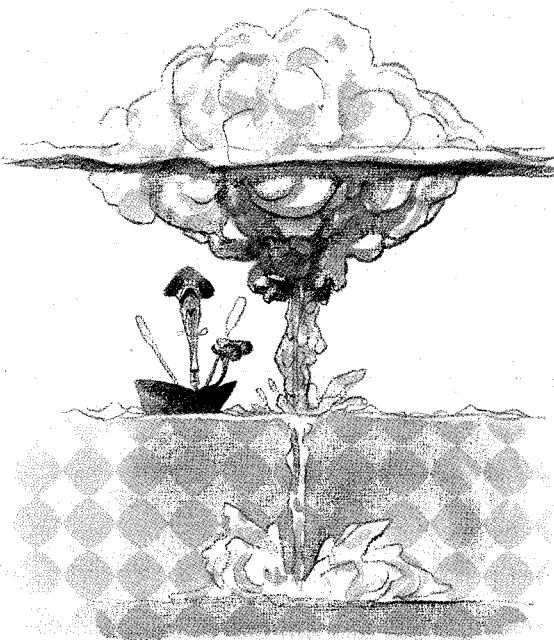
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Somewhere in Wassau Sound, near Tybee Island, Georgia, a Mark-15 bomb sits beneath the ocean floor. The bomb may be nuclear, or it may not be. It may be buried under five feet of sand, or it may be buried under forty. It is probably intact, but no one knows for sure, because the night it was dropped—February 5, 1958—was highly chaotic. The B-47 carrying the bomb, on a training mission that started in Florida, collided in midair sometime after midnight with an F-86 fighter plane on a simulated attack mission. The F-86 crashed after its pilot safely ejected. The B-47 caught fire, and its pilot jettisoned the bomb into the sea before landing. The Navy never found it, despite an intensive nine-week search.

"The Tybee bomb is a great mystery," says Derek Duke, a fifty-six-year-old former Air Force colonel who lives near Savannah. "And everyone is lured to a mystery." Absent a federal search for the weapon, Duke wants to conduct his own search. He just wants to locate it; he plans to leave excavation to the government. He is very determined. In a recent e-mail he told me that he intends to scour Wassau Sound in "a high-tech extremely visual search vessel exotic to the eyeballs" and has assembled a team "like the famous TV 'A-Team.'" It includes, he wrote, "the original US Navy search Commander"—the man who guided the 1958 hunt for the Tybee bomb—"plus a 30 year veteran CIA officer who has agency permission to be here. Nukes and counter terrorism was his bag, and maritime ops ... and the Navy Captain who launched Charles Lindbergh Jr. in 1966 off the coast of Spain in a Woods Hole deep dive sub to retrieve a live H bomb 2200 feet down in a canyon on the ocean floor, plus the man who supplied the 'General Lee' Hot Rod in the Hit TV show first filmed in Atlanta, 'The Dukes of Hazard.'"

Harris Parker—who did not design

the *General Lee*, although he did work on some of the cars in the show—is actively researching the bomb's whereabouts; the other team members serve as infrequent advisers to Duke. The colonel himself has no underwater-search experience. He is a flight instructor for a major airline and spends his spare time reading about plane crashes and soldiers missing in action. Since he learned of the missing Tybee bomb—in 1998, while trolling the Internet—he has not raised any of the \$1 million or so his search would cost. He has, however, obtained permission from a friend to use a \$2 million treasure-hunting boat rigged with a sonar system and a state-of-the-art cesium vapor magnetometer.



Duke's plans may be quixotic, but they do shine light on an old fact. As many people are vaguely aware, the Tybee bomb has plenty of company beneath the world's oceans. From 1950 to 1968 the U.S. military, by its own admission, lost eight other such pieces of Cold War materiel at sea: three complete nuclear bombs, two nuclear-bomb capsules, and three bombs without capsules. The ordnance is still down there, off the New Jersey coast, off the Azores, somewhere in the vicinity of Morocco. And each bomb or capsule is shrouded in secrets. Consider the Mark-43 that rolled, along with its airplane, off a ship into 16,000 feet of water near

Okinawa in 1965. "The aircraft, pilot and weapon were not recovered," wrote W. J. Howard, then an assistant to the Secretary of Defense, in a 1966 letter to Congress explaining this accident and three others. "No public announcement of this incident has been made, nor is any intended."

Most experts agree that the lost weapons, including the Tybee bomb, pose little danger, because they're entombed, making detonation unlikely. Duke is unpersuaded. He contends that if a major hurricane were to hit Tybee, the bomb could wash up onto the island and explode. "There hasn't been a big coastal storm to hit that area in a hundred and fifty years," he told me. "They're overdue, and the government knows it."

Duke says that weapons have emerged from stormy seas and exploded before, although he is hazy about where and when. He *does* have documentation to support his belief that the Mark-15 off Tybee is nuclear-capable: Howard's letter, which was declassified in 1994, describes the Tybee bomb as a "complete weapon," meaning that its tip contained plutonium.

Last July, Duke took the letter to Jack Kingston, a Georgia congressman. Kingston, who was running for re-election, apprehended its crackle. At a press conference he called on the Air Force to ascertain whether the Tybee bomb was in fact nuclear.

The Air Force had no choice. Dutifully its researchers went to the archives. They unearthed a receipt signed by the pilot of the B-47 just before takeoff. The receipt indicates that the bomb contained a "simulated"—that is, non-nuclear—capsule. The Department of Defense holds that this receipt is correct and that Howard's 1966 letter is not. "Classified production and maintenance records make clear that the Mod Zero was the only type of Mark-15 available on Homestead Air Force Base at that

time,” Army Lieutenant Colonel Steve Campbell, a spokesman for the department, says. “We called Mr. Howard recently, and he agreed that his memo was in error. And he is in complete control of his faculties.” Chuck Hansen, a nuclear-weapons historian and the author of *U.S. Nuclear Weapons: The Secret History* (1988), concurs with the military’s assessment and thinks that looking for the weapon would be “a waste of time and money.” A federal committee is looking into whether or not the government should renew its search for the Tybee bomb.

The committee’s report is due this summer. I called one of its authors, Lieutenant Colonel Don Robbins, of the Air Force, for a preview. Robbins said, “The bomb sits on top of an aquifer, sir, and that aquifer supplies fresh water to the local populace, sir. Dredging activities could breach the aquifer, allowing salt water to seep in, thus contaminating the drinking water. Where is the local populace going to get its water, sir?”

With his impeccable military-ese, Robbins sounded like a drill sergeant in a movie. I found this curious, because soon after Derek Duke began researching the Tybee bomb, he conceived of the weapon not only as a hazard but also as grist for a film—an eerie one, titled *Zero Count*. “In one very powerful scene,” Duke told me, describing the script, “there is an explosion of blue light from a laboratory. A guy bursts out the door, screaming, and a pregnant woman is walking by. As he falls to the ground, his hands graze her womb. The child is born with incredible autistic powers in terms of numbers. His name is Bobby Zero; he’s fascinated with the number zero.”

This fascination was crucial to the script’s plot. Early in his research Duke believed that the Tybee bomb might be fitted with a countdown timer—a clock that would “zero out,” inducing explosion, at midnight on January 1, 2000. “We were concerned that the bomb had a Y2K problem,” Duke says. “Bobby Zero had to beat the clock.”

Not until late 1999 was a workable script finished (too late for pre-Y2K release), and New Year’s Day, 2000, came

and went without nuclear incident. Duke dropped his plans for a feature film and envisioned instead a documentary that would chronicle a search for the bomb. The documentary would be laced with tension: “The key to this whole thing is that there’s a high chance of human interaction with that bomb,” he explains. “It’s in shallow water. A fisherman could stumble across it, and it’s nuclear. The government’s worst nightmare is that we’ll find it and expose the truth—that they’re putting people at risk. We’ve got to find that bomb.”

A search wouldn’t be easy, according to David Jourdan, the president of Nauticos, a Maryland firm specializing in underwater search and recovery. “I don’t want to be a wet blanket,” Jourdan told me, “but sonar isn’t really going to be effective for them. The water’s too shallow. So they’re going to have to use the magnetometer, and it’s not like they’re looking for a huge ship. That bomb is small. I’m sure its magnetic signature is practically zero. And it’s buried near shore, where the current and weather are apt to move it around. How do they know where it is? They’re going to be out there making fifty-foot swaths with the magnetometer, going ten miles an hour. They could spend a lifetime and find nothing.”

Duke, however, hopes that his search for the bomb will be quick and decisive, like the moment of triumph in a good mystery novel. “We could take a search vessel out there and find it on Day One,” he says, “because we know to within a hundred yards where it is. That bomb was dropped at a certain time, at a certain altitude, from a plane going a certain velocity. We’ve done the math—I can’t tell you any more. I don’t want to paint a nuclear bull’s-eye, because one of those idiots who bombed the World Trade Center or Centennial Park, in Atlanta, could go searching too. But I think we can find it.”

When would the search begin? I asked.

“Summer is the perfect time,” Duke said, “because you have a calm sea state. If we get the money, we could have a search under way within seventy-two hours.” —BILL DONAHUE

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MARK TWAIN'S "SKELETON NOVELETTE"

*An introduction to Mark Twain's "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage"—
a work written for these pages 125 years ago and published here for the first time*

BY ROY BLOUNT JR.

.....

When he was forty, and the nation was exactly a century old, Mark Twain concocted a project in conjunction with *The Atlantic Monthly* which came to nothing until now. There's a story in that.

"Very often, of course," Twain wrote in "How to Tell a Story," "the rambling and disjointed humorous story finishes with a nub, point, snapper, or whatever you like to call it."

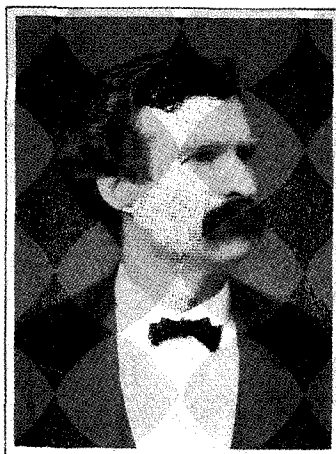
Then the listener must be alert, for in many cases the teller will divert attention from that nub by dropping it in a carefully casual and indifferent way, with the pretense that he does not know it is a nub.

Artemus Ward used that trick a good deal; then when the belated audience presently caught the joke he would look up with innocent surprise, as if wondering what they had found to laugh at.

Twain, far more than Ward, was a master of such deadpan trickery. Once, at a gala banquet, Twain delivered a toast to Ulysses S. Grant that seemed to be a long, drawn-out insult. He paused "for a sort of shuddering silence" (as he wrote exultantly to his wife, Livy), and then he delivered the snapper. Grant cracked up. "The audience *saw* that for once in his life he had been knocked out of his iron serenity," Twain wrote Livy. "The house came down with a crash."

Another time he came onstage and just stood there, expressionless, as if he weren't even aware that he was supposed to be the speaker, and realized that he could hold people silent on the edges of their seats for about as long as he wanted to without uttering a word. "An audience captured in that way," he wrote home, "*belongs* to the speaker, body and soul."

But that's not the only silent verdict an audience can render. A few days before the 1876 presidential election Twain's enduringly clueless older brother, Orion Clemens, who had declared himself an abolitionist back in the 1850s,



suddenly went over to the other party, and was given a chance to speak at a Democratic rally. Twain said in a letter to his friend William Dean Howells, the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, that Orion "wrote me jubilantly of what a ten-strike he was going to make with that speech."

All right—but think of his innocent & pathetic candor in writing me something like this, a week later: "I was more diffident than I had expected to be, & this was increased by the silence with which I was received when I came forward, so I seemed unable to get the fire into my

speech which I had calculated upon, and presently they began to get up & go out, & in a few minutes they all rose up & went away."

How *could* a man uncover such a sore as that & show it to another? Not a word of complaint, you see—only a patient, sad surprise.

Twain, too, could be sadly surprised on a rostrum. In 1877 he mortified Howells and himself by his insufficiently reverent attempt to pull the venerable legs of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Ralph Waldo Emerson—honored guests at a banquet sponsored by *The Atlantic*. After Howells rose to assure the gathering that here was a humorist who was never offensive, Twain proceeded to spin out a long, straight-faced western yarn in which Longfellow, Holmes, and Emerson *seemed* to appear as ruffians. Then came the pause, and then the snapper, and then ... none of the honorees laughed. (Emerson was not even paying much attention.) The audience sat, Howells said, in "silence, weighing many tons to the square inch, which deepened from moment to moment."

But we're getting ahead of our story. When Twain conceived the project that is just now coming to partial fruition, it was around the Ides of March in 1876. He proposed to Howells that they round up "a good &

*a mystery
+ a marriage.*

*Upon the border of a re-
mote & out-of-the-way village
in south-western Missouri
lived an old farmer named
John Gray. The village was
called Deer Lick. It was a
straggling, drawy hamlet
of ~~five or seven~~ ^{six or seven} hundred inhabi-
tants. These people knew
in a dim way, that out in
the great world there were
things called railways,
steamboats, telegraphs
newspapers, but they
had no personal ac-
quaintance with them,
~~and~~ took no more in-
terest in them than they
did in the concerns of*

godly gang” of authors—including the pre-eminent Boston Brahmins James Russell Lowell and Holmes, the recently lionized mining-camp colorist Bret Harte (from Albany, New York), and the young Henry James—who would each write a story based on one “skeleton” plot devised by Twain. The stories would appear serially in *The Atlantic*, the nation’s foremost bastion of literary standards. Throughout the rest of that year Twain urged Howells to get this unlikely project off the ground. Howells sent out feelers (though, evidently, not to anyone so august as Holmes or Lowell; Howells had taken Twain to meet Lowell two years earlier, and Lowell had not been impressed, except that something about Twain’s nose gave fuel to Lowell’s belief that all humanity was descended from the Jews). “The difficulty” about the stories, as Howells put it, was “to get people to write them.”

At that very moment history was holding its breath. Two projects of enormously greater importance than Twain’s skeleton novelette were in abeyance. Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden were engaged in a presidential race whose muddled outcome would have to be resolved by dealmaking in and out of the House of Representatives.

And Twain got stuck halfway through *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—lost interest, and said he might burn the manuscript.

Two great, and not unrelated, turning points in American history and culture. The result of the election of 1876 would be seen as a betrayal of the verdict of the Civil War. Tilden won the popular vote, owing in good measure to the intimidation of southern blacks, who would have voted Republican, and Hayes won the electoral vote, by 185–184—if you counted the contested results in the states where the votes were never going to be recounted impartially. An Electoral Commission was formed; it voted for Hayes, strictly along party lines. Tilden’s Democrats in the House mounted a filibuster, so Hayes’s Republicans agreed to remove from the South the federal troops that were enforcing Reconstruction. The party of Lincoln thus relinquished its commitment to advancing the rights and opportunities of emancipated African-Americans. The 1876 election has often been cited in connection with our recent chad-splitting presidential imbroglio, whose outcome has led to apprehension or anticipation that affirmative action, a fruit of the civil-rights movement, will be abandoned as a federal goal. If Reconstruction had worked as planned, we wouldn’t have needed a civil-rights movement a hundred years after the war.

And what if Twain had neglected to finish his masterpiece? That novel—in which a poor, good-natured white boy from a slave state comes to respect and assist a runaway slave, in defiance of all the dictates of antebellum society—would blend standard English and New World vernacular, black and white, into the template of American narrative. All modern American literature, Ernest Hemingway would say in 1935, began with that book.

If we could come up with a skeleton plot for the quintessential American writer’s career, wouldn’t it call for him to realize the momentousness of 1876? Twain himself was a refugee from a slave state and, indeed, from the Confederate Army. His earliest storytelling influence was a slave named Uncle Daniel, who would weave a ghostly web and then jump out at the black and white children gathered around him. “A True Story,” Twain’s first contribution to *The Atlantic*, published in 1874, was a poignant tale in the form of an ex-slave’s monologue. *The Atlantic*, though traditionally independent of party affiliation, had firmly supported the abolitionist-Republican position before and during the war. Now Reconstruction, along with the Great American Novel, was hanging in the balance. And yet, judging from the letters between Twain and Howells at the time, what was weighing heavily on Twain’s mind was “A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage,” the skeletal project that never went beyond the story you are about to read.

He was coy about showing his version to Howells; whether he ever did, and exactly what happened to the manuscript over the next seventy years or so, is unclear. In

MANUSCRIPT COURTESY OF HARRY RANSOM HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTER, UNIV. OF TEXAS, AUSTIN

1945 two men who had bought the manuscript from an auction house printed up sixteen copies in hopes of establishing copyright, but the Twain estate sued to prevent publication. Last year the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library acquired the publication rights.

This links the story in another way to the separate halves of *Huckleberry Finn*. In 1885, the year the novel was finally published (Twain didn't return to writing it until 1879 or 1880), the Young Men's Association Library, in Buffalo, New York, which later became the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, asked Twain to donate the manuscript to its collection. Twain, who had lived briefly in Buffalo some fifteen years earlier, replied that as far as he knew the first half had been destroyed by the printer, but he sent the second half on. A hundred and five years later the first half was discovered—in an attic in, of all places, Hollywood. Researchers on the staff of the Mark Twain Project, at the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley, then dug up an 1887 letter in which Twain said he had found the first half after all and was forwarding it to the Young Men's Association Library. The curator there meant to have the first half bound but didn't get around to it. When he died, the manuscript was left in a trunk, which his widow conveyed to Hollywood in the 1920s, when she moved there to be close to her daughter. So the two halves of the handwritten *Huckleberry Finn* are together in the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, which is now enabling publication of one of the distractions that kept the writing of them apart.

Over the years "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage" has been overlooked almost entirely by the myriad scholars who have scrutinized every other scrap of Twain's voluminous writing. *Mark Twain A to Z* (1995), a reliable and comprehensive reference book, confuses it with an earlier, unfinished piece that Twain set down in a notebook in 1868. *The Atlantic*, at any rate, would not likely have published it back in 1876.

Now it seems more interesting. Does it in any way reflect Twain's deepest concerns? What made him want to share it with such a disparate band of writers (particularly *Henry James*)? Why did Twain call one of its meanest characters David Gray—the name of a sweet-natured friend of his? What was going on in his mind? And what were Mark Twain's politics anyway?

An afterword to the story will fill in the history of Twain's project and attempt to answer the questions it raises, including what Mugwumpery meant to Twain and what his mark may have been on another great American novel, whose plot has to do with determining and influencing the leanings of a dangling or disconnected character named, as it happens, Chad.

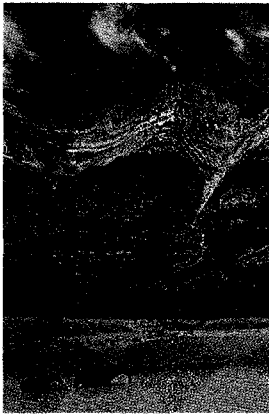
But here follows "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage," published for the first time, in the pages for which Mark Twain intended it 125 years ago. ■



99
many chapters of ~~my~~ his 1st Eighteen Months
in the Furnace, ^{which} ~~and~~ who
he employs to stir up
around & gather the
facts while he toasts
himself in his private
apartments & exaggerates
them. Moreover, I want
to know where he lit
when he fell.
Mark Twain

Top: William Dean Howells and Mark Twain in Redding, Connecticut, 1909. Above and on facing page: sheets from the manuscript of "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage"

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With canvas tops rolled back and red paint gleaming, the Red Bus fleet of Glacier National Park carried generations of spellbound tourists through a landscape of heart-stopping splendor.

Launched in the 1930s, the elegant touring buses climbed across the continental divide amid sheer cliffs and glacial summits—allowing sightseers to relish the scenery rather than navigate mind-bending curves. For six decades, the classic fleet was a cherished park icon, part of the lore and lure of Glacier itself.



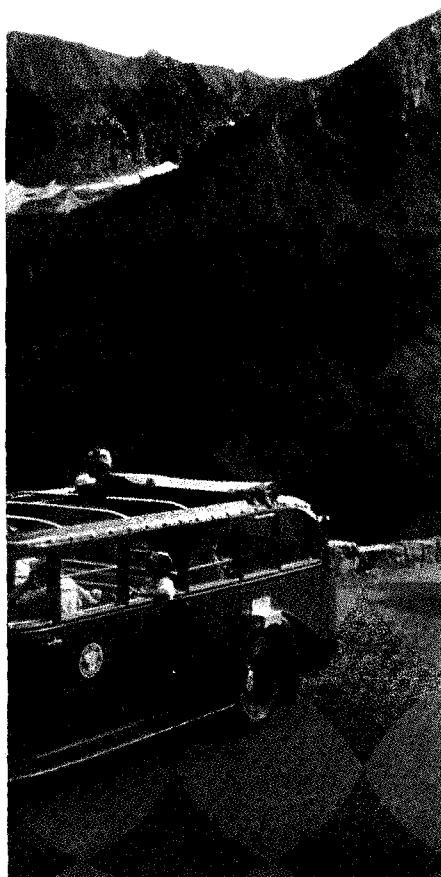
More than mere transportation, the buses provided a one-of-a-kind education. Drivers identified wildflowers, explained park geology, pointed out the park's elusive mountain goats, shared legends of the Blackfeet Indians, led impromptu hikes to hidden waterfalls, and always knew which pullouts guaranteed the most spectacular photographs.

But by 1999, though more popular than ever, the buses were still running on 1930's automotive technology. Concerns about no emission controls, metal fatigue, and safety finally brought the legendary fleet to a standstill. And, as a new millennium dawned, the Red Buses were retired.

Seasons unfolded, but without the familiar flash of red, the landscape was incomplete. Visitors, rangers, and locals mourned the loss, so linked were the buses to Glacier's history and spirit.

Then an idea. Ford Motor Company stepped in with a plan to implement new technology and expertise in alternative fuels. But rather than using that technology to replace Glacier's outdated buses, Ford suggested using it to preserve the historic fleet. Replace each chassis, convert the buses to run on clean propane fuel, and save a priceless piece of Glacier's heritage.

In March 2001 the plan became reality. And now, a new generation of travelers—perhaps great-great-grandchildren of those first curious tourists—will ride the Red Buses again, gasping in wonder at the panorama before them. Today's fleet will leave smaller footprints on the land and air it traverses. But on the hearts of travelers the imprint, as always, will be unforgettable. To find out more about Ford Motor Company's involvement with the National Parks, feel free to visit their website.



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A MURDER, A MYSTERY, AND A MARRIAGE

BY MARK TWAIN

Illustrations by Peter de Sève

.....

U pon the border of a remote and out-of-the-way village in south-western Missouri lived an old farmer named John Gray. The village was called Deer Lick. It was a straggling, drowsy hamlet of six or seven hundred inhabitants. These people knew, in a dim way, that out in the great world there were things called railways, steamboats, telegraphs and newspapers, but they had no personal acquaintance with them, and took no more interest in them than they did in the concerns of the moon. Their hearts were in hogs and corn. The books used in the primitive village school were more than a generation old; the aged Presbyterian minister, Rev. John Hurley, still dealt in the fire and brimstone of an obsolete theology; the very cut of the people's garments had not changed within the memory of any man.

John Gray, at fifty-five, was exactly as well off as he was when he had inherited his small farm thirty years before. He was able to grub a living out of his land, by hard work; by no amount of endeavor had he ever been able to do more. He had had ambitions toward wealth, but the hope of acquiring it by the labor of his hands had by slow degrees died within him and he had become at last a blighted, querulous man. He had one chance left, and only one. This was, the possibility of marrying his daughter to a rich man. He observed with content, that an intimacy had sprung up between Mary Gray and young Hugh Gregory; for Hugh, in addition to being good, respectable and diligent, would be left tolerably well off whenever his aged father's days should come to an end. John Gray encouraged the young man, from selfish motives; Mary encouraged him because he was tall, honest, handsome, and simple-hearted, and because she liked curly auburn hair better than any other. Sarah Gray, the mother, encouraged him because Mary liked him. She was willing to do anything that might please Mary, for she lived only in her and for her.

Hugh Gregory was twenty-seven years old, Mary twenty. She was a gentle creature, pure in heart, and beautiful. She was dutiful and obedient, and even her father loved her as much as it was in him to love anything. Presently Hugh began to come daily to see Mary; he and she took

long horseback rides when the weather was pleasant, and in the evenings they had cosy confidential chats together in a corner of the parlor while the old people and Mary's youthful brother Tom kept to themselves by the fireplace and took no notice. John Gray's nature was softening fast. He gradually ceased to growl and fret. His hard face took to itself a satisfied look. He even smiled now and then, in an experimental way.

One stormy winter's night Mrs. Gray came beaming to bed an hour later than her husband, and whispered:

"John, everything's safe at last. Hugh has popped the question!"

John Gray said:

"Say it again, Sally, say it again!"

She said it again.

"I want to get up and hurrah, Sally. It's too good for anything! *Now* what'll Dave say! Dave may go to grass with his money—nobody cares."

"Well, old man, nobody does care. And it's well it's so, because if your brother ever might have left us his money he'll never do it now, because he hates Hugh like p'ison—has hated him ever since he tried to cheat Hugh's father out of the Hickory Flat farm and Hugh chipped in and stopped the thing."

"Don't you worry about any money we've lost of Dave's, Sally. Since the day I quarreled with Dave, twelve years ago, he has hated me more and more all the time and I've hated him more and more. Brothers' quarrels don't heal easy, old wife. He has gone on getting richer and richer and richer, and I've hated him for that. I'm poor, and he's the richest man in the county—and I hate him for *that*. Much money Dave would be likely to leave to us!"

"Well, you know he used to pet Mary a good deal before you quarreled, and so I thought maybe—"

"Shaw! 'Twas an old bachelor's petting—no money in it for Mary—you can depend on that. And if there might have been, it's all up with it, now, as you say; for he wouldn't give her a cent that Hugh Gregory might ever get hold of."

"Dave's a mean old hunk, anyway you can fix him, pap. I wish there was some other place where Hugh could sleep

when he is in the village over night but in the same building with David Gray. Hugh's father has tried to get Dave to move his office out of there, time and time again, but he sticks to his lease. They say he is always at the front door of a morning, ready to insult Hugh when he comes down stairs. Mrs. Sykes told me she heard Dave insult Hugh one morning about six weeks ago, when three or four people were going by. She looked to see Hugh break his head, but he didn't. He kept down his temper, and never said anything but 'Mr. Gray, you might do this thing once too often, one of these days.' Dave sneered at him and said, 'O yes, you've said that before—why don't you *do* something? what do you talk about it so much for?'

"Well, we'll go to sleep, old woman. I reckon things are going about right with us at last. Here's luck and long life to Hugh and Mary—*our* children—God bless 'em!"

CHAPTER 2.

ABOUT eight o'clock the next morning the Rev. John Hurley rode up to John Gray's gate, hitched his horse and ascended the front steps. The family heard him stamping the snow off his boots, and Mr. Gray delivered a facetious glance at Mary and said:

"Seems to me Hugh comes a little earlier and a little earlier every morning, don't he, honey?"

Mary blushed and her eyes sparkled with a proud pleasure, but these things did not keep her from flying to the door to welcome—the wrong man. When the old clergyman was come into the presence of the family, he said:

"Well, friends, I've got some splendid news for ye!"

"Have you, though?" said John Gray. "Out with it, Dominie, and I'll agree to cap it with better news still, which I'll give *you*."

He cast a teasing glance at Mary, who dropped her head. The old minister said:

"Good—my news first and yours afterward. You know, David Gray has been down on the South Fork for a month, now, looking after his property there. Well the other night he staid at my son's house, there, and in the talk it came out that he made his will about a year ago and in it he leaves every cent of his wealth to—whom do you suppose? Why, to our little Mary here—nobody else! And you can depend on it I didn't lose a minute after reading my son's letter. I rushed right here to tell you—for, says I to myself, this will join those estranged brothers together again, and in the mercy of God my old eyes shall see them at peace and loving each other once more. I have brought you back the lost love of your youth, John Gray—now cap it with better news if you can! Come, tell me your tidings!"

All the animation had passed out of John Gray's face. It was hard, troubled, distraught. One might have supposed he had just heard of a crushing calamity. He fumbled with his garments, he avoided the inquiring eyes that were fixed upon him, he tried to stammer out something, and failed.

The situation was becoming embarrassing. To relieve it, Mrs. Gray came to the rescue with—

"*Our* great news is that our Mary here—"

"Hold your tongue, woman!" shouted John Gray.

The simple mother shrank away, dumb. Mary was confused and silent. Young Tommy Gray retired the back way, as was his custom when his father showed temper. There was nothing to be said; consequently nobody said anything. There was a most awkward silence for a few moments, and then the old clergyman made his way out of the place with as little ease and as little grace as another man might who had got a kick where he looked for a compliment.

John Gray walked the floor for ten minutes rumpling his hair and growling savagely to himself. Then he turned upon his cowed wife and daughter and said:

"Mind you—when Mister Gregory comes for his answer, tell him it is *no*! Do you hear? Tell him it is No! And if you can't muster pluck enough to tell him I'd rather he wouldn't come here any more, leave it to me. I'll tell him."

"O, father, you don't mean to say—"

"Not a word out of you, Mary! I *do* mean to say it. There, now. Just drop the matter."

With that, he flourished out of the house, leaving Mary and her mother in tears and heart broken. It was a brilliant winter morning; the level prairie that stretched abroad from John Gray's house to the horizon, was a smooth white floor of snow. It was just as the storm of the night before had left it—unmarred by track or break of any kind.

John Gray plowed his way through the snow straight out into the prairie, never noting what direction he took, nor caring. All he wanted was room to relieve his mind. His thought ran somewhat after this fashion:

"Just my luck! This thing *would* turn up exactly at the wrong time, of course! But it ain't too late, it ain't too late, yet. Dave shall soon know that there ain't anything in the talk about Mary and Gregory—if he has heard it, but I know he hasn't, else he'd have snatched her out of his will in a minute. No, he shall know that nobody of the tribe of Gregory can have Mary—or look at her, even. One good thing, she'll never say yes to him or any other man till she knows I'm willing. I'll send Mr. Gregory a-tramping, in short order! And I'll mighty soon let everybody know it, too. What's Gregory's money to Dave's! Dave could buy all the Gregorys twenty times over, and have money left. Just let it be spread around that Mary is to have Dave's money and she can take her pick and choice in six counties around. Hello, what's this!"

It was a man. A young man, under thirty, by his looks, dressed in a garb of unfamiliar pattern, and lying at full length in the snow; motionless, he was—evidently insensible. His dress had a costly look about it, and he had several jewels and trinkets upon his person. Near him lay a heavy fur coat and a couple of blankets, and at a little distance a valise. About him the snow was somewhat tumbled,

but everywhere else it was still smooth. John Gray cast his eye around for the horse or the vehicle that had brought the stranger, but nothing of the kind was to be seen. Moreover, there was no track of wheels or horse, or of any man, either, save the tracks he had made himself, in coming from his house. Here was indeed a wonder. How did the stranger get there, more than a quarter of a mile from a road or a house, without breaking the snow, or leaving a track? Had the hurricane blown him thither?

But this was no time to be inquiring into details; something must be done. John Gray put his hand into the stranger's breast; it was still warm. He fell to chafing the chilled temples. He towseled and tumbled his patient, and rubbed snow on his face. Signs of life began to appear. John Gray's eye fell upon a silver flask that lay in the snow by the blankets. He seized it and poured some of its contents between the stranger's lips. The effect was encouraging; the man stirred a trifle, and heaved a sigh. John Gray continued his efforts; he raised the man to a sitting posture, and presently the closed eyes opened and gazed around with a dazed, lack-lustre expression. Next they dwelt a moment upon John Gray's face and something more of life came into them.

"I wish he'd speak," said Gray to himself. "I've a powerful hankering to know who he is and how he got here. Good—he *is* going to speak!"

The lips parted, and after an effort or two, these words came forth:

"Ou suis-je?"

The eager expectancy in John Gray's eyes faded out and left his face looking blank enough. He was grievously disappointed.

"What kind of jabber might that be?" said he to himself.

He quickened the stranger's consciousness with another draught from the flask. The handsome foreign eyes peered perplexedly into John Gray's a moment, and then this question followed:

"Wo bin ich?"

John Gray stared stupidly, and shook his head.

"It ain't a Christian," thought he; "maybe it ain't a human. I'd think so if it wasn't for its harness; but—"

"Dónde estoy? Dove sono? Gdzie ja jestem?"

A sorely bothered expression spread its blank expanses over John Gray's face, and the stranger perceived, with plainly apparent distress, that once more he had failed to make himself understood. He struggled to raise himself to his feet; he undermined John Gray's already tottering reason with a succession of graceful but complex signs drawn from the deaf and dumb language; then he began to rail at Gray, in a peculiarly barbarous foreign tongue for idling there and looking stupid when he ought to be bestirring himself and giving all the help he could to an unfortunate stranger. For the first time Gray spoke aloud. Said he:

"By George, he's woke up at last! And he's woke up all over, too. There ain't no doubt about—"

"O, you're English! you're English! Good! Why didn't you say so? Come, bear a hand! help me up! I'm worth twenty dead men, yet! Pound me, rub me, kick me! Give me brandy!"

The amazed farmer obeyed orders vigorously, under the spur of the stranger's commanding tones, and meantime the patient's tongue ran on, sometimes in one language, sometimes in another. Finally he made a step or two, leaning upon Gray, then stopped and said in English:

"My friend, where am I?"

"Where are you? Why you're in my prairie. You're in the edge of Deer Lick. Where did you think you was?"

"Prairie? Deer Lick?" said the stranger, musingly. "I don't know these. What *country* am I in?"

"What *country*? Why, dern it all, you ain't in *any* country. You're in Missouri. And it's the banner State of America, I reckon."

The stranger put his hands impressively upon John Gray's shoulders, held him at arms' length a moment, looked him steadily in the eyes, then nodded his head two or three times, as if satisfied. An hour later he was in bed at John Gray's house, tossing to and fro in a restless sleep, burning up with a fever, and murmuring brokenly, and ceaselessly, in nearly all languages but English. Mary, her mother, and the village doctor, were working over him faithfully.

CHAPTER 3.

We skip six months, and go on with our history. The old clergyman had tried hard to unite the two brothers, but had failed. David Gray had firmly declined to make or receive overtures. He said he had no liking for any member of his brother's family but Mary.

Mary Gray had permitted herself to steal one interview with Hugh Gregory, simply to assure him that whatever her duty to her father might oblige her to do, her love for Hugh would remain perfect, undiminished, while she lived. There was an exchange of pictures and locks of hair, a distressful parting, and there an end. The lovers glimpsed each other at church and other places, now and then, but there was seldom an interchange of glances, and never of speech. Both seemed listless, and tired of life.

Meantime the stranger had risen into great prominence. He had set up as a teacher of languages, music, and a little of everything else that was new and marvelous to that backwoods community. For a while he had remained mysteriously silent about his origin; but gradually he dropped a word or two privately into the ears of the Grays while he was recovering from his illness. After he had become well his visits to the house were frequent and welcome; for he had a high-bred grace of deportment which was the envy and admiration of everybody, and a tongue that could fascinate a graven image. He compelled Mary Gray's regard by his gentleness, his considerate ways, the purity of his sentiments,—his vast knowledge,



Here was indeed a wonder.

his adoration of poetry; the old people were charmed by the respect, indeed the reverence, which marked his conduct toward them; he was always astounding the boy Tom with marvelous inventions in the way of scientific toys, so Tom was his devoted ally. By dribblets Mr. George Wayne—for so he called himself—made himself known to the old people confidentially, and they confidentially delivered the facts to their particular friends, who straightway conferred them confidentially upon the community at large. One night Mrs. Gray brought some fresh news to bed with her. She said:

"John, I've been having such a talk with Mr. Wayne! What do you think? Now don't you ever tell—not a word to anybody—don't you ever let on to *him*, even—because he said it wouldn't ever do to let it be known."

"Out with it you old fool, out with it! I'll keep mum."

"Well, you know he used to always shet up like a shell whenever we asked him what countryman he was. Times we've thought he was an I-talian, then a Spaniard, and times we thought maybe he was an A-rab. But he ain't. He's a Frenchman. He told me so. And that ain't all, by a grand sight. His family is awful rich and grand."

"No! is that so? I always said it to myself. 'Deed I always said it."

"And that ain't all, either. His father's a lord!"

"No!"

"Yes! And *he's* a lord, too!"

"Great Caesar!"

"True as you're a laying there, he said it. He's a Count! Think of that!"

"By George! But what did he leave home, for?"

"That's what I'm a coming at. His father wanted him to marry a grand girl, for her wealth and high style. He wouldn't; said he'd marry for love or not at all. Then they had words. Then there was some politics mixed up in it. This one is down on the king, or the emperor, or whatever he is, and it got found out, and he had to clear the country. He dassn't go back for two years, he says—till the law's time's up—or they'll fling him into prison and make him pay like smoke besides."

Mr. Gray sat up in bed, pretty thoroughly excited.

"Old woman, I wish I may never stir if I haven't said to myself forty times, 'This pelican's a king or something!' It's so, b'George! I just knowed it; something seemed to tell me so. Thunder, but this is a go!"

"Well, *I* always thought there was something kinder uncommon and gaudy about him, too."

"Old woman"—in a low voice—"don't you know, he's got his eye on our Mary! Say, don't you know that?"

"Well, as you say, I've kinder thought it, sometimes—but then, he's up so high, and so rich—"

"Never you mind about that. Didn't he tell his old father he wouldn't ever marry, only for love! You encourage him, that's all. And I will, you bet."

"But husband, she's just a-wasting away for poor Hugh—and if it only *could* be, I do wish—"

"Hang poor Hugh! That was a good escape. A mighty good escape. You want to do the best you can by your daughter, don't you? Well, I do, too. Think of her being a grandee's wife like that! Don't you know she wouldn't worry long about Hugh Gregory? Why of course. Say—what's his *real* name?"

"Mind, husband, you're never to tell. It's Count Hubert dee Fountingblow. Ain't it a sweet name?"

"Well, I bet it is. Blamed if I don't wish *I* had a handle like that. John Gray! My name ain't fitten for a rat! Look here, Sally, it ain't going to do to ever let go a single word about him being a Count. Not a word. All the girls in forty miles around would be after him."

There was some more talk. Then by and by the conversation drifted into the Count's relations with Hugh Gregory. It appeared that the two young men had become pretty intimate with each other, and frequently visited each other's rooms. Mrs. Gray said she had heard that the Count had tried several times to patch up a peace between Hugh and old David Gray, but had failed every time. David had become pretty fond of the Count, and liked to have him visit his office and talk, but steadily refused to make up with young Gregory.

By and by Mr. and Mrs. Gray ceased to chat, and began to drop off to sleep. At this point John Gray suddenly roused up and whispered hoarsely in his wife's ear:

"Say, Sally, there's one more thing. From the very day that I found young Mr. Fountingblow out yonder in the snow, we've all pegged at him in one way or another, to tell how he got there without making a track—but he always shet himself up and swapped off onto something else when we got to that. Come—how *did* he get there? Did he say?"

"No. Said he'd ruther tell by and by. Said it might get around, and he had reasons for not wanting it. But he said he'd tell *us* by and by."

"Well, all right, if it can't be helped. I'll sweat it out a spell longer, but I'm just a-busting to know."

CHAPTER 4.

There was a leaky vessel somewhere. Within a week everybody was talking in whispers about "Count Fontainebleau" and his incredible riches. People were saying, also, that the Count was paying marked attentions to Mary Gray, and that John Gray was strongly and his wife feebly urging Mary to look with favor upon his suit.

In truth Mary was in a good deal of trouble. She was trying hard to mould herself to her parents' wishes, but nightly and in secret she found herself kissing a certain picture and crying over a certain lock of hair.

One day the Count spent an hour with David Gray, in

his office, chatting about various matters. He led gradually up toward the subject of matrimony, and was finally about to speak of his hopes with regard to Mary Gray when David was suddenly called out. The Count listlessly amused himself with inspections of such odds and ends of documents as lay around or were exposed in half-open drawers. One paper he read with great interest, then said,—

"It was just as well to make sure; and now I am satisfied. It was a false report."

He took his leave and wended toward John Gray's house. He sought Mary and was told she was in the orchard. He went thither, and wandered among the paths, until, in a remote corner of the place he caught a glimpse of female apparel protruding from behind a tree where was a rustic bench which was large enough to seat two persons and had been very useful at times during the past twelve-month. He approached, and appeared suddenly to Mary. She hastily concealed Hugh Gregory's picture in her bosom, then rose with her handkerchief to her eyes—for she was crying.

"Mary, my honored, my worshiped friend," said the Count, taking her hand in his courtly way, "Your poor heart is breaking, and I am the cause. O, it was a fatal thing that I knew you before I knew that you loved—him. To see you was to love you. None could help that. Afterward, when I found that your father had forbidden that marriage, I felt that my love for you could no longer be a wrong toward you or toward poor Hugh. I insanely hoped that you might come, by and by, to give me a place in your heart. But I fear it can never be. Your tears, your grief, are for Hugh, and heaven knows he is worthy. I must try to give you up. For your sake, whom I love better than life, fortune, repute,—better than my own soul!—I must try to do this impossible thing! Do not speak, I beseech you!—I cannot hear the music of your voice and maintain my resolution. I am a creature of impulse. The spectacle of your distress, this moment witnessed by me, has suddenly wrought within me the power to do this act of self-sacrifice, and as suddenly must I perform it and take myself from the sight of your face and the sound of your voice, or I fail. I go—I make my endeavor—God send me a speedy death!—it is all I ask! O, not a word! not a word, I implore you! Farewell, I yield you up, my precious one! My darling, my darling, farewell, and God keep you!"

With his handkerchief to his face, he was flying toward the house the next instant. Mary Gray, standing like one paralyzed, gazed after him until he had disappeared, then she said, sobbing:

"O, how little I knew him! He is a thousand times nobler by nature than the highest blood and the oldest ancestry could make him. Five minutes ago I almost hated him. Now—why now I could almost—love him! O, I shall respect him, honor him, reverence him, all the days of my life—great, pure, noble heart!"

CHAPTER 5.

During three days the Grays saw nothing of the Count. The father and mother wondered, but said little, for they observed that Mary was in better spirits than usual, wherefore they judged that matters must be improving between her and the Count.

About the fall of evening, on the third day, the Count was standing on a village corner holding a moment's conversation with David Gray when Hugh Gregory passed by; stopped; hesitated; returned and asked the Count if he should be going to his lodgings presently. Before the Count could reply, David Gray said:

"Don't waste your time with me, Count, when there's better and purer and sweeter people to associate with. I'll let you go at once."

"Do you mean that for me, sir?" said Hugh.

Several passers-by stopped to listen.

"Yes, I *do* mean it for you, my peach. *You* didn't stop here to make that remark to the Count. You stopped here because you thought it would aggravate *me*. You know you did. You're always doing it. You think maybe I don't know you. It was the like of *you* that wanted Mary Gray, was it? All for love, too, I reckon—didn't have any idea I was going to leave her my little savings. O, of course not! But I'll show you a thing or two, my lad. If I live forty-eight hours I'll make a new will and leave Mary Gray clear out of it. Don't scowl at me like that, my friend, I won't put up with it."

"It is useless to bandy words with a lunatic," said Hugh, with a forced calmness. "I will take my—"

The irascible old man's cane crashed down upon Hugh's head as he turned upon his heel, making him stagger, and interrupting his remark. The next instant Hugh's fist shot from his shoulder and stretched David Gray at his length upon the ground. In a frenzy of anger Hugh sprang forward to continue the assault, but was seized by several persons and borne from the place, he struggling to free himself, and exclaiming, "Let me at him, let me at him! he has insulted me brutally fifty times and nothing shall stop me from squaring the account!"

CHAPTER 6.

About ten o'clock the next morning the Count entered John Gray's house, and John Gray's heart was glad once more. His lordship looked worn, weary and wretched. He said:

"Absence from this house is misery; there is no happiness but here! My heart hungers—let me see Mary!"

The prayer was promptly answered; Mary came, the others went. The Count said:

"O, I had to come—I could not live where you were not! I tried so hard—for your sake—to give you up, but it was beyond my strength. Look at me—behold in every hair of my head and every feature of my face a witness of the tortures I have endured. I could not sleep, I could not rest. I have



"Let me at him, let me at him!"

come to throw myself upon your mercy—to plead for your compassion, to beg for my life. I cannot live without you. I have tried so hard, so cruelly hard—and failed. Have pity upon me!”

Mary’s compassion was stirred to the depths, her tears fell like rain. She tried to say comforting things; he answered with passionate beseechings. So the sorrowful struggle went on, till John Gray burst into the room and exclaimed:

“David is murdered! Hugh Gregory is in jail for it!”

Mary swooned away.

All day the village was in a turmoil. All occupations were suspended. Crowds stood for hours in front of David Gray’s office, talking about the murder, and waiting patiently for chance opportunities to enter and stare at the grisly spectacle within. The dead man lay in a sea of blood. The overturned furniture showed that there had been a struggle. On the desk lay a sheet of legal cap upon which David Gray had begun a sentence, but had not lived to finish it—to wit:

“I, David Gray, being of sound mind and—”

Near the corpse had been found a fragment of cloth which exactly fitted a vacant corner of Hugh Gregory’s coat-skirt; several very small sprinkles of blood had been found upon Hugh’s pantaloons; here lay the opening sentence of a will which was to sweep away the prospective fortune of the girl whom Hugh Gregory was hoping to marry some day; it was whispered that Hugh’s father had lately been getting into dangerously deep water, financially; the rencontre of the evening before was dilated upon; somebody brought up a remark which Hugh had once made, that David Gray would revile and insult him “once too often, some day.”

Plainly Hugh Gregory was the murderer. Everybody admitted that, and grieved over it. Most people believed, however, that he had been moved by no sordid impulse, but by an uncontrollable desire for vengeance for long-continued injuries. Hugh declared his innocence stoutly, in the face of the fatal array of circumstantial evidences which pointed to him as the criminal. The declaration of his innocence had such a seemingly honest ring about it that it made some of the villagers waver in their beliefs for a while, but only a while; for about the middle of the afternoon a bloody knife, well known to belong to Hugh was found secreted in the foot of his feather bed; a trifling little red stain upon the ticking had called attention to the small rip which had been made for the purpose of admitting the knife.

No human being believed in Hugh Gregory’s innocence, now, except Mary Gray, and her confidence was diminishing. Hugh sent her a letter imploring her to have faith in his guiltlessness, for that God would surely reveal it in His good time, out of His great grace; but this letter tarried in John Gray’s hands and went no further. During several days Mary Gray waited in misery for an answer to a note which she had written to Hugh begging him to give her a word of comfort; but no answer came—to her. Tommy Gray

had promised to smuggle Mary’s letter into Hugh’s hands and had accomplished his mission; but the elder Gray had his eye on the boy; he captured the reply and easily terrified the boy to that degree that he was glad to report to Mary that Hugh had crumpled her letter in his hands and declared that if she really loved him she would be moving heaven and earth for his rescue instead of fooling away precious time in inquiries concerning his guilt or innocence. Several days and nights of anguish followed, with no comfort for the girl save such as she could glean from the gentle attentions and kindly words of the Count.

At last she gave up all hope, and resigned herself to the bitter conviction of Hugh Gregory’s guilt. Her mother’s conviction was the same. So Hugh Gregory’s name ceased to be mentioned in that house. Mary found, however, that crime could not kill love. She loved Hugh Gregory still—it was a love that would not down. But she could never marry him, she said. Let come what might, now, she said; she no longer cared what destiny might be in store for her.

As the weeks rolled on she learned to like the Count, for she came nearer to finding rest in his society than in any other.

It would take long to detail the beggings, beseechings and worryings which ended at last in wearing out Mary Gray’s resistance and compelling her consent to marry Count Fontainebleau. Possession of the wealth which had come to Mary by the death of her uncle—and thus to all the family—only whetted her father’s desire to climb higher and be allied to foreign nobility. The matter of appointing the wedding day was broached. Mary said, wearily:

“Name it yourselves. It is nothing to me. Only give me a little time to rest.”

The 29th of June was appointed, the wedding to be strictly private, in John Gray’s house. From that day forth, Mary Gray ceased to go outside the door or see anyone but the family and the Count. The news of the day, and the village gossip were never referred to in her presence. There was but one thing promised by the future which had interest for her. She had been assured that Hugh’s trial would be delayed for a year or two by lawyers’ shifts, and that he would probably not outlive that time, for his health was already failing, somewhat.

But in truth the trial came on very shortly. This fact was kept from Mary. The verdict of guilty was delivered on the 22^d of June. The day appointed for the hanging was the 29th—the wedding day!

Confusion! What was to be done? Delay the wedding? No. It would not be necessary. The whole village was in a tumult of distress. David Gray had been generally detested, Hugh Gregory universally beloved. The people had brought themselves to expect only a verdict of manslaughter, and imprisonment. Already messengers were flying across country toward the capital; unquestionably there would be a long reprieve, possibly a free pardon. Then

wherefore delay the marriage? Mary knew nothing of the verdict, or even of the trial.

CHAPTER 7.

It was an uncomfortable group that sat together in John Gray's house late in the morning of the 29th of June, for all but Mary knew that no reprieve had come. It made even John Gray shudder to think of conferring an unsuspecting girl in marriage upon a man she did not love while the man she did love was walking to a shameful death. Mrs. Gray had been in bed ill, during a week, crushed with the dread of the possible miscarriage of the reprieve or pardon. The old clergyman had refused to officiate, and a passing stranger had been brought to serve in his place. He had been received at the door by John Gray and cautioned not to mar the joy of the occasion by any reference to the sad affair progressing in the village. The stranger said, in a guarded voice:

"You did not need to caution me. No one could speak of such a thing at such a time as this. I came by the gallows. All the people were collected there. None were unmoved; all the women and some of the men were crying. That young man was standing upon the gallows, between the sheriffs, the rope swaying in the wind over his head. He was pale and emaciated, but he stood erect like an honest man. And he spoke, too. He proclaimed his innocence. He said that his were the words of a dying man, and that in the sight of God he was guiltless. Voices all about cried out, 'We believe you, we believe you.' Twice he said he was ready, and the sheriffs took hold of the noose and the black cap, but both times a great shout arose of 'Wait, wait, for the love of God! the reprieve will come, the pardon will come!' Then everywhere I saw people mounted upon wagons and branches of trees, shading their eyes with their hands, and gazing away off over the prairie, and saying every little while, 'There! isn't that a man on horseback?—no—yes—away yonder is certainly a black speck—surely that is a horse!' But it was always a disappointment. At last the sheriffs drew the black cap down over the poor lad's face, and such a wail as went up from the people! I could not stand it. I fled. Ah how they loved that poor soul, how the mother-hearts there pitied him!"

The minister and John Gray entered the parlor. A blessing was invoked, then Mary stood up, pale and listless, between Count Fontainebleau and her father. The marriage service proceeded:

"Hubert Count Fontainebleau, do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, promising to love honor and cherish her until death shall you part?"

The Count bowed his head.

"Mary Gray, do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, promising to cleave unto him, to—"

For some seconds a far-off sound had been murmuring in the ears of the company, and rapidly growing in volume,

as if its cause were approaching. It now burst into a succession of mighty cheers, close at hand, and in another moment a mob of shouting villagers came pouring into the house, with Hugh Gregory and the sheriffs in the van.

With a single glance Mary Gray read the whole blissful truth in Hugh's eyes, and the next instant she was in his arms. In the same moment the sheriffs seized Count Fontainebleau and manacled him. John Gray had to look his inquiries—he was dumb with stupefaction. A sheriff said:

"Never mind—it's all right. This devil done that murder. He had a pal, and the pal weakened and peached when he see Hugh just going to swing off. Told the whole story; and just as he was winding up, here comes a reprieve from the Governor. I'm intruding here, now, because of course the first man I wanted to see was this duck."

Hugh said:

"There is no need of my explaining why this is the first place I wanted to come to and display the face of a guiltless man!"

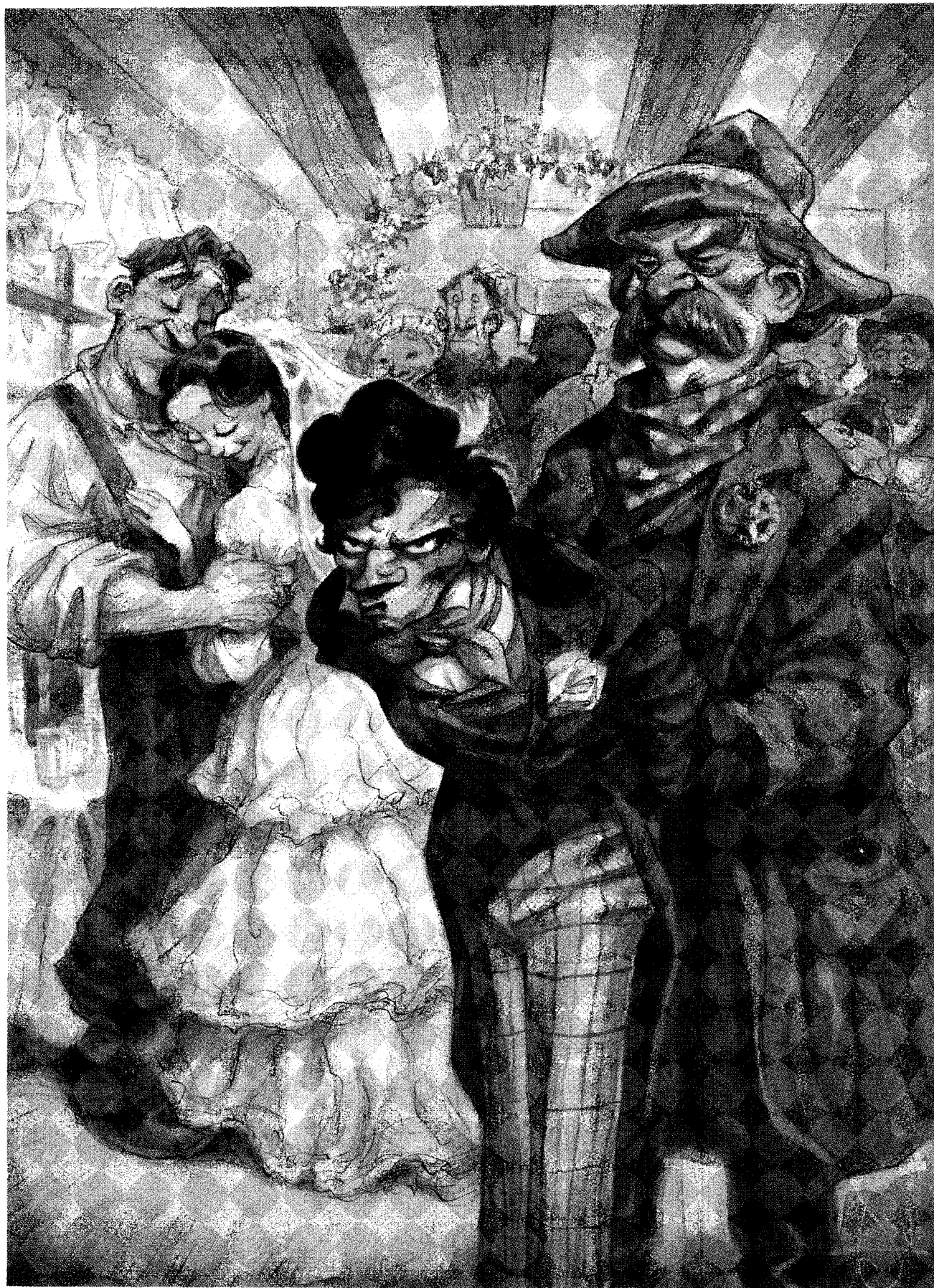
The minister was modestly moving away.

"Stop!" said John Gray. "Let the marriage go on! Stand up, Mary Gray and Hugh Gregory, and may I die the death if I ever draw another mean breath while my name is John Gray! Here comes the old woman; everything's complete, now, minister—tie the knot and tie it tight!"

CHAPTER 8.

THE COUNT'S CONFESSION.

Under sentence of death for the murder of David Gray, which I committed one year ago, I make this true record of my life. My name is Jean Mercier. Born in a village in the south of France. My father was a barber. I learned and followed the trade a while. But I had talent and ambition. Without help from anybody, I gave myself a sort of universal education. I learned many languages, made good success in the sciences, and became a good deal of an inventor and mechanic. I learned navigation at sea. By and by I tried my hand as a guide—a courier. I carried tourists all about the world. At last, in an evil hour, I fell into the hands of a Monsieur Jules Verne, an author. Then my troubles began. He paid me a great salary, and sent me here and there and to and fro in all sorts of disagreeable vehicles, and then he listened to my adventures and made each of my journeys into a book. That would have been all right if he had confined himself to the facts; but no, nothing would do him but he must spread. He turned my simple experiences into extravagant and distorted marvels. This humiliated me beyond expression, for I was very sensitive in the matter of truth and honest dealing—at that time. All my friends knew how I was employed; they believed that those atrocious stories had been set down just as I had spoken them—and one by one they ceased to recognize me—they regularly cut me. I remonstrated with M. Verne repeatedly—it did no good. This monster sent me down the Seine in a



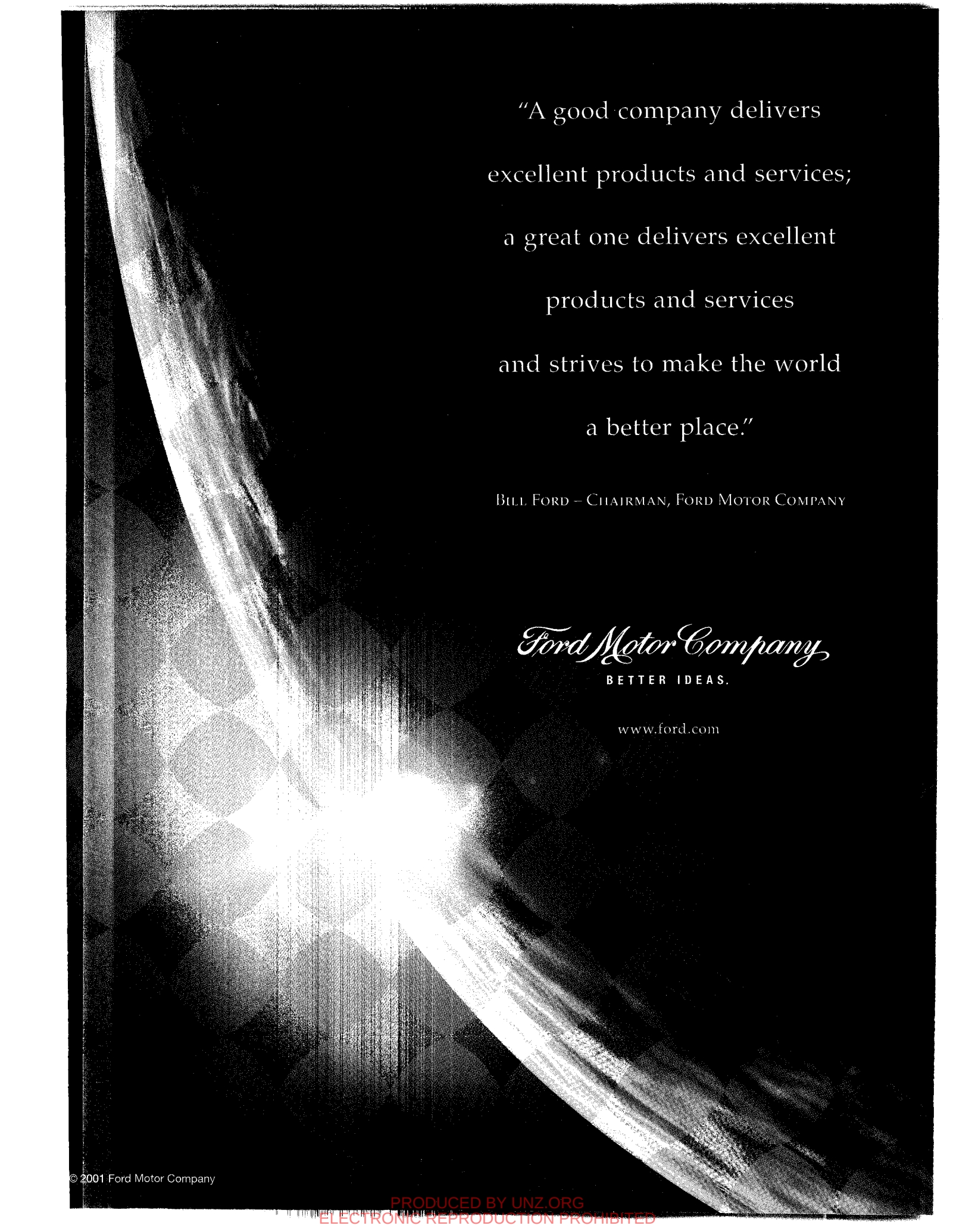
"This devil done that murder."

leaky old sand-barge; when I came back, he listened to my tale and went to work and spread it out into that distressed book called "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." Next he bought an old second-hand balloon and sent me up in it. The old bladder went up about two hundred yards and then collapsed, and I fell in a brick-yard and broke my leg. The literary result of that trip was the book called "Five Weeks in a Balloon"—the heartless fraud! He sent me on one or two more little foolish flights in that ragged thing and wrote extravagant books about them. Well by and by he sent me from Paris all the way to a beggarly town at the very tail end of Spain, in an ox-cart. I was nearly a year on the road, and almost died of low spirits and starvation before I got back. What was the result? Why, "Around the World in Eighty-five Days!" He patched up his miserable balloon, and sent me on one more trip. I stuck fast in the clouds over Paris without budging, for three days, waiting for a wind, and then slumped down into the river, caught a fever and was abed upwards of three months. While I lay there I brooded over my miseries and by and by murderous thoughts became familiar to me—pleasant to me, I may say. When I got well he said he had fitted up the balloon in the most perfect way and was going to take the next voyage with me. I was glad. I hoped we might both break our necks. He put his valise, his fur coat and all his fine toggery into the balloon, along with a lot of provisions, liquors and scientific instruments. Just as we sailed he put into my hands his distortion of my last trip—a book entitled "The Mysterious Island!" I glanced into it—that was enough. Human nature could stand no more. I hove him out of the balloon! He must have fallen a hundred feet. I hope it killed him, but I don't know. Of course I didn't want to be hanged, so I hove out the scientific instruments to lighten ship; then I put on M. Verne's good clothes, and began to enjoy myself with his food and wines. But I had lightened ship too much. I went so high that sleep got the best of me, and presently insensibility. I never knew anything after that until I woke up in John Gray's prairie in the midst of the snow. Do not know what became of the balloon. But I do know, by the dates, that I made the trip from France to Missouri in two days and twenty-one hours. And John Gray will understand, now, how I managed to travel across his prairie without leaving a track—he was always curious about that, poor man; but I judged that if I told him it would wander away and get into print, he wafted to France, and then some meddler would want to know if this ballooning foreigner might not be able to shed some light upon M. Verne's last moments.

I concluded it would be best for me to take a fictitious name and stick close to Deer Lick the rest of my days; but I could not abide the idea of teaching school forever for a living. So when I happened to hear that David Gray had put

Mary Gray into his will for his entire property, I tickled her father with my false foreign wealth and grandeurs, and began my courting. One day David Gray left me alone in his office a moment, and I rummaged around, and found a will giving the whole property to a distant relative of David's instead of to Mary. My love cooled, and I went straightway and told Mary I would try to tear my love out of my heart, for her sake. But when Gregory and David Gray quarreled in my presence I discovered that I had been spying out an old will and that there was a newer one which would still leave the property to Mary. So I once more resolved to marry Mary, and I knew I could do it. That unpleasant old Mr. Gray would be alive now, and I would be patiently waiting for him to drop off in a natural way, if he had not been so foolish as to swear he would go home and make a new will disinheriting Mary. It seemed to me best that he should take a berth with his fathers right away. Murder comes easy to a man whose mind has been unsettled by tortures such as M. Verne had inflicted upon me. I at once hired an accessory to keep watch at David Gray's door while I disposed of that person. I was to give this assistant a farm. He has only himself to thank that he is not a landed proprietor in this most charming and intellectual community of pious hog-raisers to-day. Well, at midnight I borrowed a knife of Mr. Gregory—that provincial sleeps like a gravestone and snores like a locomotive—and in fifteen minutes David Gray had retired from active pursuits. He had just begun his new will—and if, from that day to this, I have been thanked by Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Gregory for permanently interrupting that document in its very first sentence, the circumstance has escaped my memory. I got a bad scratch or two on my hands, in the struggle, but I always wore gloves, (a custom which I had all to myself in this artless region,) wherefore these were not seen by anyone. I returned Mr. Gregory's knife to him—at least I put it in his bed; then I borrowed a piece of his coat tail to put with the corpse, and after bidding him a good-night, which he answered with a snore, I put a few little blood stains on his pantaloons and took my leave. I knew there were no brains in the community, therefore the hidden knife and the blood stains would be damning evidences against that snorer. Brains would have said, 'None but a fool would leave blood on his clothes and hide his knife in his bed-tick, let alone call attention to the hiding place with a blood-spot.' Farewell, good hog-cultivators, I am willing to go, being filled with a consuming desire to ask the late Monsieur Verne how many chapters of his "Eighteen Months in the Furnace" he has written, and whom he employs to stump around and gather the facts while he toasts himself in his private apartments and exaggerates them. Moreover, I want to know where he lit when he fell. ▀

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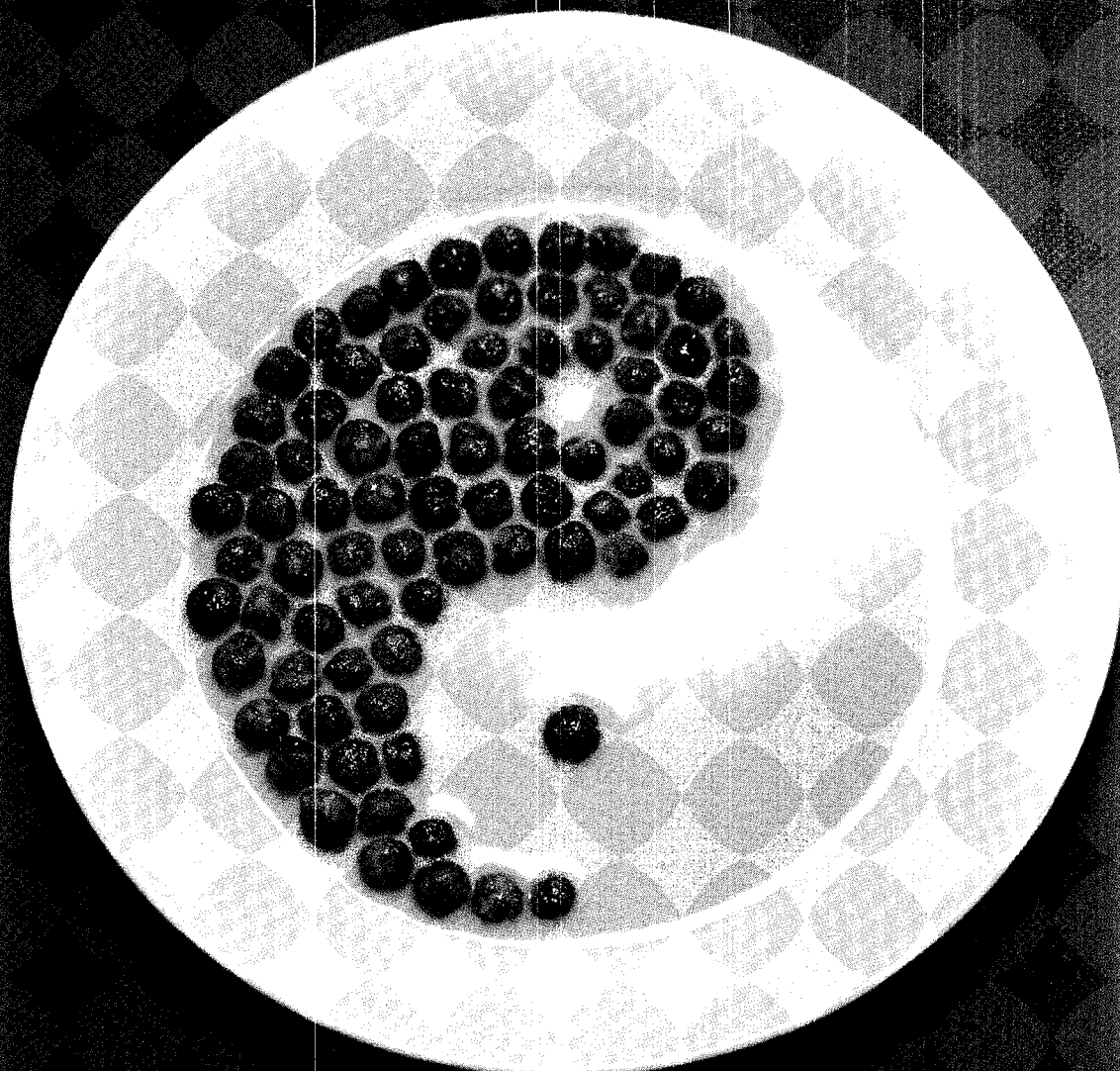
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MARK TWAIN'S RECONSTRUCTION

*"A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage"
and its moment in history*

BY ROY BLOUNT JR.

Illustration by Mark Summers

....

There's a nub or snapper for you—dumping the burden of guilt into the lap of Jules Verne, and Verne overboard into thin air, and leaving open the possibility of a sequel set in either hell or France, which in Twain's Francophobic mind were similar. Postmodern, we might call this fusion of unrealistic fiction and unobjective criticism.

And yet that snapper has been followed by 125 years of silence. If by any chance Twain has found himself, to his surprise, in heaven, he may be looking down on us now, irritably, wondering whether he will *ever* be able to look up from that story with mock-innocent surprise, triumphant in having sprung true surprise upon the unsuspecting.

As it is, the reader may just be left wondering what Twain had against Jules Verne. We will come to that. The reader may also be wondering why the whole story is marked by ill (in more than one sense) humor. It hardly seems to have sprung from the same imagination that had so recently been producing the friendship of Huck and Jim and the following portrait, in Huck's words, of the late teenage mortuary poet Emmeline Grangerford:

Every time a man died, or a woman died, or a child died, she would be on hand with her "tribute" before he was cold. She called them tributes. The neighbors said it was the doctor first, then Emmeline, then the undertaker—the undertaker never got in ahead of Emmeline but once, and then she hung fire on a rhyme for the dead person's name, which was Whistler. She warn't ever the same, after that; she never complained, but she kind of pined away and did not live long.

What was bugging Mark Twain in 1876, to make him think up the benighted village of Deer Lick? He was already perhaps the nation's most famous writer. He was ensconced—happily, for a time—in a mansion resembling a steamboat in Hartford, Connecticut, with his well-born, wealthy wife and his first two daughters. Thanks to the influential Howells, Twain had also won

critical recognition as far more than a wild western humorist.

In 1869 Howells, then an assistant editor, had taken the unusual step of reviewing in *The Atlantic Monthly*, with great enthusiasm, a book distributed not by a respectable publishing house but by the more commercial means of advance subscription peddled door to door. Aside from a collection of sketches that had attracted little notice, it was Twain's first book, and one of his best: *Innocents Abroad*. "I had the luck," Howells later recalled, "if not the sense, to recognize that it was such fun as we had not had before." Twain, clad in a sealskin coat with the fur side out, paid an unannounced visit to the staid Boston offices of *The Atlantic* to thank the anonymous reviewer, and a warm friendship commenced that would last until Twain's death.

Howells also drew Twain's work into the pages of *The Atlantic*, which Twain appreciated because, as he put it, the magazine "don't require a 'humorist' to paint himself striped & stand on his head every fifteen minutes." Aside from publishing "A True Story" and other short pieces, Howells encouraged Twain to write for *The Atlantic* a series of reminiscences about his days as a riverboat captain, "Old Times on the Mississippi," which would later make up the best part of one of his best books, *Life on the Mississippi*. Howells vetted the manuscript of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, which would be published (and praised by Howells in *The Atlantic*) in 1876.

It was probably during Howells's visit to Hartford the weekend of March 11 (a day or two after Alexander Graham Bell, incidentally, had gotten the first telephone to work) that Twain proposed an editorial package. He and Howells would work up a "skeleton" plot and have twelve authors each "write a story, using the same plot, 'blindfolded' as to what the others had written." On April 2 Howells wrote to the novelist Thomas Bailey Aldrich, another friend of Twain's, who would become Howells's successor as editor of *The Atlantic*: "I send also a scheme of Mark Twain's which we shall carry out if we can get any one to help. That is he

and I will write a story on the proposed basis, if you and two or three others will do so."

On April 22 Twain wrote to Howells that he had gone ahead and composed, in two days, a full-blown version of the story. On April 26 he wrote again to Howells, saying, "Mrs. Clemens says my version of the blindfold novelette ... is 'good.' Pretty strong language—for her. However, [her remark] is not original. God said the same of another Creation."

On April 28 Howells wrote back, "Aldrich was here today, and we talked over the Blindfold Novelette business. But we've neither of us begun ours. Can't you send me yours?"

Twain's May 1 reply was both a bit pushy and defensive:

Here is the "Blindfold Novelettes." You will see that I have altered it as we contemplated. The most prominent features in the story being the Murder & the Marriage, the one name will aptly fit all the versions. Then the thing will read thus in the headings:

"A Murder & a Marriage. Story No. 1 ..."

You could add to this screed of mine an editorial bracket to this effect—

"Messrs. Howells, [John T.] Trowbridge, etc., have agreed to furnish versions of this story, but it is also desirable that any who please shall furnish versions of it also, whether the writers be of literary fame or not. The MSS offered will be judged upon their merits & accepted or declined accordingly. The stories should be only 8 or 10 Atlantic pages long.—*Ed. Atlantic*."

Something of that sort, you know, to keep people from imagining that because my name is attached to the proposition, the thing is merely intended for a joke.

Presumably, what Twain sent then was the skeleton outline, because on May 4 he wrote again that he was coming to Boston and "I'll bring my Blindfold Novelette, but shan't exhibit it unless you exhibit yours. You would simply go to work & write a novelette that would make mine sick. Because you would know all about where my weak points lay. No, Sir, I'm one of these wary old birds!"

What happened over the summer with regard to this project is not known. In June, Sitting Bull's Sioux wiped out General George Custer's cavalry at Little Big Horn. On the Fourth of July, America celebrated its centennial, and later that month Hayes accepted the Republican nomination. In August, Twain set aside the novel he had been working on for the past month. "I have written 400 pages on it—therefore it is very nearly half done," he wrote to Howells. "It is *Huck Finn*'s Autobiography. I like it only tolerably well, as far as I have got, & may possibly pigeon-hole or burn the MS when it is done."

He had not cooled off, however, on the novelette scheme. On August 23 he wrote to Howells, "We must get up a less elaborate & a much better skeleton-plan ... & make a success of that idea. David Gray spent Sunday here & said we could but little comprehend

what a rattling stir that thing would make in the country. He thought it would make a mighty strike."

Who was David Gray? "The gentlest spirit and the loveliest that ever went clothed in clay, since Sir Galahad laid him to rest," according to Twain. They had begun a lifelong friendship in 1870, when Twain was living in Buffalo, where Gray was an editor at the *Buffalo Daily Courier* and Twain was a contributor to, and part owner of, the rival *Buffalo Express*. With \$25,000 lent him by his future father-in-law, Jervis Langdon, of Elmira, New York, Twain had bought into the *Express* in 1869, and settled down into marital life. When Sam Clemens married Olivia Langdon and moved into a Buffalo mansion bought for the couple by Jervis, Gray and his family became the Clemenses' only intimate friends in that city. The Buffalo roots did not hold: Jervis Langdon came down with stomach cancer and died; Olivia fell ill and nearly died; her houseguest Emma Nye stayed on to nurse her and came down with typhoid fever and died; and Olivia delivered a premature and never healthy child, Langdon Clemens, who would live for only nineteen months. Twain sold out his interest in the *Express* at a loss of \$10,000 and moved the family to Hartford. But they remained close friends with the Grays. Why, then, would Twain appropriate David's name, in this "mighty strike" of a story, for an "irascible," "generally detested" murder victim?

Let us note that the narrator of Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* lassoes Galahad off his horse. The real-life David Gray was pious and neurasthenic, but a good sport. He was also, like Orion Clemens, a Tilden supporter. In their correspondence Twain and Howells joked that this was a sure sign Tilden would lose. Gray wrote poetry rather like the example of Emmeline Grangerford's given in *Huckleberry Finn*. He must have been the sort of innocent, like Orion but with money, whose chain Twain loved to pull. Gray seems to have been the first person to whom he showed a sketch he had written, set in the court of Queen Elizabeth, "which shook ... Gray's system up pretty exhaustively." This sketch would be printed privately in 1880 as "1601 Conversation, As It Was by the Social Fireside, in the Time of the Tudors," a bit of ribaldry that is pretty much one fart joke after another. Then, too, "gray" is an uninspiring mixture of black and white.

In October, Howells wrote that he wasn't having any success generating interest among other writers. He suggested that Twain simplify the plot. Twain said he would: "All it needs is that the hanging & the marriage shall not be appointed for the same day. I got over that difficulty, but it required too much MS to reconcile the thing—so the movement of the story was clogged." Later that month Twain wrote again.

I see where the trouble lies. The various authors dislike trotting in procession behind me. I vaguely thought of that in the beginning, but did not give it its just importance. We must have a new deal. The Blindfold Novel-

ettes must be suggested anonymously. [Charles Dudley] Warner says, let this anonymous person say his uncle has died & left him all his property—this property consisting of nothing in the world but the skeleton of a novel; he does not like to waste it, yet cannot utilize it himself because he can't write novels ... in which way he hopes to get 6 or 8 novels in place of one, & thus become wealthy.

Now I would suggest that Aldrich devise the skeleton-plan, for it needs an ingenious head to contrive a plot which shall be prettily complicated & yet well fitted for lucid & interesting development in the brief compass of 10 Atlantic pages. My plot was awkward & overloaded with tough requirements.

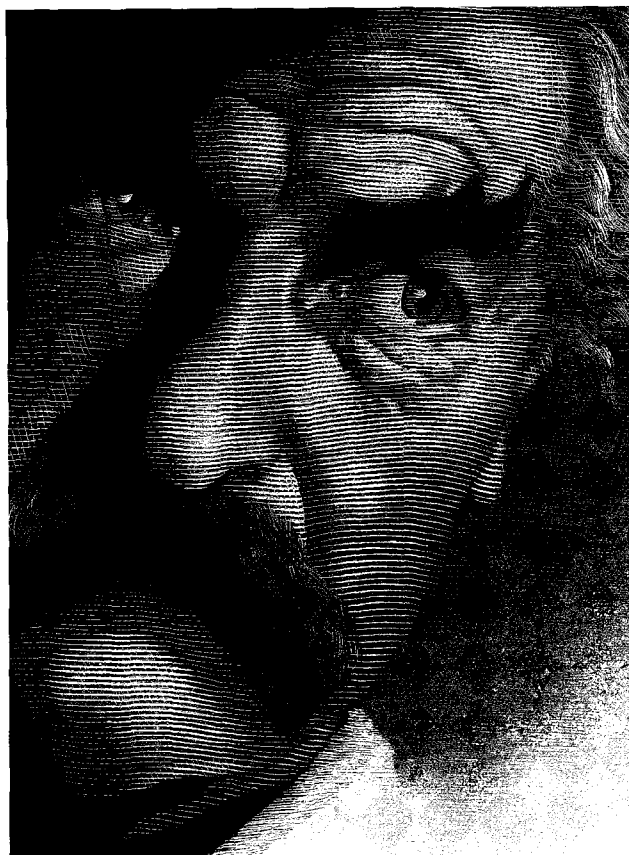
Warner will fill up the skeleton—for one. No doubt Harte will; will ask him. Won't Mr. Holmes? Won't Henry James? Won't Mr. Lowell, & some more of the big literary fish?

If we could ring in one or two towering names beside your own, we wouldn't have to beg the lesser fry very hard. Holmes, Howells, Harte, James, Aldrich, Warner, Trobridge [sic], Twain—now there's a good & godly gang—team, I mean—everything's a team, now.

Nearly three years later, in April of 1879, Twain was still writing to Howells, "Can't you get up a plot for a 'skeleton novelette' & find two or three fellows to join us in writing the stories? Five of us would do. I can't seem to give up that idea." Five years after that he was pushing the idea, unsuccessfully, on *Century* magazine and George Washington Cable. What was the fascination?

He had begun a similar sketch in his notebook in July of 1868 (the same month that the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution granted citizenship to former slaves). The narrator is "John L. Morgan, of Illinois, a farmer & a man of good reputation," who tells of finding, on a plain covered by fifteen inches of snow, an emaciated man who does not look like an American. Morgan thinks, "He was too weak to hold his horse, & has been thrown from a wagon or from the saddle." And yet "there was no sign of wheel, hoof or boot anywhere around."

The stranger is carried to the farmer's house. A doctor is summoned and neighbors gather, advancing theories as to how such a thing can have happened: "The spiritualists came to the conclusion that the spirits brought the man there, & this seeming to be the most reasonable idea yet advanced, spiritualism rose perceptibly in the favor of unbelievers." The stranger awakes and begins to speak in an unknown tongue. The schoolmaster arrives, diagnoses it as French, and translates. The stranger is Jean Pierre Marteau, who ran away from his village home at sixteen and went to sea. Unjustly, he was convicted of a killing. After nearly seven years as a galley slave and several failed escape attempts, he was on a work detail in Paris when, under guard, he came upon a crowd around "an immense balloon swaying about ... made fast to the ground by a rope."



A man was making a little speech. He begged the multitude to be patient ... The balloon was distended with gas, & struggling to get away. An idea flashed like lightning through my brain. I tore loose from the guard, snatched the hatchet from his hand, threw my tools into the car, jumped in & cut the anchoring rope with a single stroke!

Whiz! I was a thousand feet in the air in an instant.

There the entry ends. Later Twain added a note: "While this was being written, Jules Verne's *Five Weeks in a Balloon* came out, & consequently this sketch wasn't finished."

Too bad, because it has more intrinsic *whiz* than "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage." Verne's international best-sellerdom began with *Five Weeks in a Balloon*. Can Twain's obsession with the skeleton-plot project have derived from resentment over Verne's having invented science fiction just as Twain was getting his balloon off the ground? In 1878 Twain tried to discourage Orion from writing an imitation of Verne: "I think the world has suffered so much from that French idiot that they could enjoy seeing him burlesqued—but I doubt if they want to see him imitated." Some fifteen years later Twain himself tried to burlesque *Five Weeks in a Balloon*. In *Tom Sawyer Abroad* he sent Tom, Huck, and Jim up in a balloon with a character called The Professor, who falls overboard above the Atlantic. It is a bad book. At any rate, Twain was a highly competitive author, much given to putting himself up against others.

Which brings us to that “good & godly gang.” In *Tom Sawyer*, the book that Twain had most recently finished, Tom makes a great production of organizing himself, Huck, and their friend Joe Harper into a band of pirates. They steal away from their homes, commandeer a raft, and float down the Mississippi to an island. Joe and Huck keep getting tired of the game, but Tom rallies them, especially after he slips back home, eavesdrops, and is gratified to learn that everyone in the village thinks the boys have drowned. Instead of showing himself and dispelling poor Aunt Polly’s grief, he goes back to the island and keeps the gang together for a couple of days until they can show up triumphantly at their own funeral, just as the entire congregation has been reduced to tears. Tom thereby wins affection from Aunt Polly, the envy of other boys in school, and the heart of Becky Thatcher. At the end of the book Tom is planning a new gang—of robbers. “A robber is more high-toned than what a pirate is . . . In most countries, they’re awful high up in the nobility—dukes and such.” Huck has escaped from the civilizing clutches of the Widow Douglas, but he agrees to give respectability another try when Tom tells him it is the only way he can be included in the new gang.

Huck is Twain’s disreputable and good-hearted side, Tom his manipulative, reputation-hungry side. Lowell and Holmes were the *crème* of eastern literary society, Aldrich a rising figure in those circles, Howells the nation’s

leading literary arbiter. Harte had been Twain’s mentor when Twain was learning to write, out in California, and had preceded Twain to literary recognition and fame in the East. Trowbridge was best known as the author of “Darius Green and His Flying Machine,” a whimsical poem about a farm boy trying to impress his peers by constructing a set of wings and trying to fly with them from a barnyard loft. (That poem’s last lines, “On spreading your wings for a loftier flight, / The moral is—Take care how you light,” rather resemble the last words of “A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage.”) But Trowbridge was also a longtime contributor to *The Atlantic* and the author of serious books, including one that recounted his postwar tour of the South, where he saw farmers literally ploughing around corpses. Warner was a co-editor of the *Hartford Courant* and an established author with whom Twain had recently collaborated in writing *The Gilded Age* (1873), a satire on Reconstruction-era corruption. If Twain had managed to get all these big and middling fish following “in procession behind me,” he would have set himself ahead of just about every considerable literary element in America at the time. Oh, and James was the only young writer

who attracted from Howells anything like the fond support he conferred on Twain.

Of all the gang that Twain hoped to enlist in his project, the most unlikely was Henry James. Can any sane person, we may ask, have expected to get Henry James’s juices flowing with a plot abounding in bumpkins, spleen, assault, and battery? In a story by Henry James it would be not a European fallen into America but an American popping up in Europe; and if, yet, in some sense, falling, then not onto a prairie of all things but—if *alfresco*, indeed, must be—into, or rather in, the charming garden of a richly paneled estate of a woman dressed all in black—but a black that strikes the observer’s needle eye as light and transparent—a woman, in fine, who knows something that may well be evil, for all that she does not “turn” a “hair”; and if, after all, indeed fallen, *not* fallen, in any case, from a balloon. People do not fall from, having never had *a priori* the faintest of inclinations to clamber into, balloons in stories by Henry James. Nor are they stabbed by knives (glances, yes); if they die at all, they expire of causes no more heavily definite than, *comme on dit*, something socio-somatic, assuming that in any very much more coarsely

corporeal sense than the psychological they for that matter have in the first place “lived” at all, if to live is to be negotiably up to whatever it is that Europeans . . .

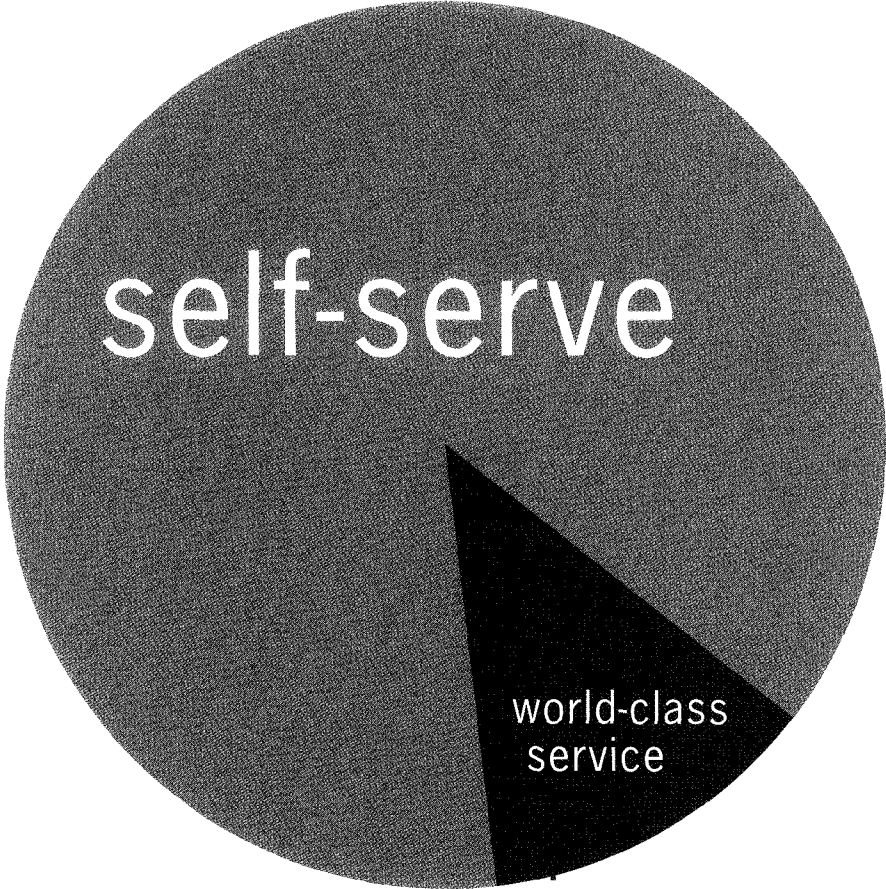
Consider, in Twain’s story, this sentence: “It was a man.” That, in a story by Henry James, would not,

as the master himself might put it, “do.” Nothing so rude, nothing so uninflected, nothing so blockily un-ductile—nothing, in short, so short—would serve.

But here we are thinking in terms of the mature James. As of 1876 James was still early. His style had not yet attained the subtlety of even *The Bostonians*, about which Twain wrote Howells in 1885 that he “would rather be damned to John Bunyan’s heaven” than read it—much less the daunting complexity of the later fiction, in which even Howells rather lost interest (as he never did in Twain’s). James had published readily readable ghost stories in *The Atlantic*. What made Henry so fine, that he wouldn’t want in on a project of Mark’s?

Twain/Clemens had a lifelong fascination with pairs (often a good boy set off against a bad boy), twins (preferably Siamese), dream selves, doubleness, imposters, opposites joined. He and James—who was eight years younger and lived six years beyond Twain’s death—were the great heads and tails of American fiction in the late nineteenth century. And neither intended to settle for tails. Twain’s personality, prose, and humor were outgoing, broad, and visceral, James’s introverted and refined. Twain

Was Twain struggling with some skeleton of his own? The tone of his story is anything but ingratiating. Everything in Deer Lick is squalid. What happened?



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created a great illusion of speech happening before us on the page, James of cogitation. Twain loved to draw powerful people into his orbit, as James was sensitive enough to realize. The two met several times over the years. After an early encounter, at dinner in London in 1879, James wrote to Howells that Twain was “a most excellent pleasant fellow ... what they call here very ‘quaint.’ Quaint he is!” This was the year after James published *Daisy Miller*, portraying a surpassingly charming and above all innocent American girl whose ingenuousness brings her to grief abroad. In 1900 James reported in a letter to his sister, Alice, that in a recent conversation Twain had offered “a muddled and confused glimpse of Lord Kelvin, Albumen, Sweden and half a dozen other things,” but the confusion—though Twain’s drawl no doubt had a good deal to do with it—was mostly James’s: Twain had been referring not to Lord Kelvin but to a fashionable Swedish osteopath named Kellgren.

Leon Edel has written,

A little touch [of this confusion] would be imported into *The Ambassadors* in the character of the dyspeptic Waymarsh. This hypothesis gains some credence when we discover, in James’s original plan for the novel, that the character was first named Waymark. The “sacred rage” of Waymark-Waymarsh has in it perhaps a touch of the sacred rage of Mark Twain.

Lambert Strether, the central character of *The Ambassadors* (1903), is much like James himself: detached from life but tremulously sensitive to the faintest social vibration, like the boy in school who never quite gets the whole guy thing and therefore notices everything. Sam Clemens was a sickly and bookish child and a nervous, delicately built man. Howells took note of his “taper fingers and pink nails, like a girl’s,” and of his “sensitively quivering in moments of emotion.” Twain’s lifelong bent for mischief and adventure may have been a semi-conscious effort not to be such a fellow as Strether.

The rich American woman Strether hopes dispassionately to marry sends him to Paris to see about her son, Chad Newsome, who, she fears, is associating with a Frenchwoman of the world. Waymarsh, his fellow American in Paris, is a gruff, unsubtle (“The only tone he aimed at with confidence was a full tone”) former congressman (irony there, Twain having defined Congress as America’s only native criminal class) who indeed resembles Twain physically—“the great political brow, the thick loose hair, the dark fuliginous eyes.” At one point Strether sees Waymarsh “looking out, in marked detachment, at the Rue de Rivoli ... —it was immense how Waymarsh could mark things.”

“Oh, he’s much more in the real tradition than I,” Strether says, and “He’s a success of a kind I haven’t approached” (Twain’s books made lots of money, James’s precious little). Waymarsh “doesn’t understand—not one little scrap,” one worldly character says. “He’s delightful. He’s wonderful.”

Very belatedly, Strether figures out (“Is she bad?”) that Chad is indeed caught up in chic adultery. And although Strether is both shocked and fascinated, he doesn’t interfere, though this means sacrificing his own marital future. Realizing that he has missed out on life, he proclaims to youth—in the person of Chad’s friend, an icky self-described “little artist-man” named Little Bilham—that a person should go ahead and “Live!” (*The Ambassadors*, according to James, was inspired by a similar bit of advice that was conferred on a real young man by the comparably timid Howells.) Waymarsh, whom Strether has never quite trusted, blows the whistle on Strether to Mrs. Newsome and winds up as the conquest—in some Jamesian sense—of the unappealing Mrs. Pocock from back home. So it wasn’t Twain who managed to co-opt James, but *au contraire*.

Twain, Edel wrote, was “the historian and embodiment of a kind of American innocence” that James “devoted his lifetime to studying.” In “A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage” the words “innocence,” “guiltless,” “guildlessness,” “pure,” “purity,” “purer,” “simple-hearted,” “unsuspecting,” and “artless” appear fifteen times altogether, “guilt” or “guilty” three. A fallen man in the midst of pure driven snow tries to impose guilt on an honest man, but innocence wins out. Twain’s first big book was *Innocents Abroad*; the book of his that he pronounced his favorite, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, celebrated at stultifying length the innocence of the Maid of Orléans. And he dubbed his house in Redding, Connecticut, the one he died in, Innocence at Home—until his daughter made him change it to Stormfield.

Several elements in “A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage” recur in the second half of *Huckleberry Finn*. The intrafamily feud evokes the interfamily one between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons; Twain set the novel aside just before that feud flared into violence. The fake Count presages the greatly more memorable King and Duke. Hugh Gregory’s belated response to continued insults anticipates Sherburn’s shooting of Boggs. The fallen balloonist is in effect a runaway slave. And in both works innocence condemned is vindicated in the nick of time. One moment in the story, inconspicuous as it is, resonates throughout Twain’s writing. It is when the preacher brings glad tidings, he thinks, and John Gray responds with an embarrassing silence, and Mrs. Gray begins with “Our great news” and her husband shouts, “Hold your tongue, woman!” And “the simple mother shrank away, dumb ... and then the clergyman made his way out of the place with as little ease and as little grace as another man might who had got a kick where he looked for a compliment.”

Innocence slapped down. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck finds Jim weeping with remorse. He is remembering the time when he told his little daughter to shut the door.

"She never done it; jis' stood dah, kiner smilin' up at me. It make me mad; en I says agin, mighty loud, I says:

"Doan' you hear me?—shet de do'!"

"She jis' stood de same way, kiner smilin' up. I was a-bilin'! I says:

"I lay I *make* you mine!"

"En wid dat I fetch' her a slap side de head dat sont her a-sprawlin'. Den I went into de yuther room, en 'uz gone 'bout ten minutes; en when I come back, dah was dat do' a-stannin' open *yit*, en dat chile stannin' mos' right in it, a-lookin' down and mournin', en de tears runnin' down. My, but I *wuz* mad, I was agwyne for de chile, but jis' den—

The wind slammed the door shut but the child didn't blink, and Jim realized that scarlet fever had left her "deef en dumb—en I'd been a-treat'n her so!"

Twain's work is full of such moments. Huck's father beats him for no reason. (Huck's response is as affectless as Orion's letter about everyone's walking out on his speech.) Aunt Polly slaps Tom Sawyer when it was his pious brother, Sid, who really broke the sugar bowl. (Tom, characteristically, finds that he is "morosely gratified" by this rare excuse for self-pity—even, in the long run, empowered. Becky Thatcher calls him "noble" for taking a licking in school for something she did.) A late, maudlin story, "A Dog's Tale," is narrated by a dog who drags the family baby away from a fire in the nursery but is

beaten by the father (another Mr. Gray), who, not having noticed the fire yet, thinks the dog is hurting the baby. "I did not know what I had done," the dog says, "yet I judged it was something a dog could not understand, but which was clear to a man and dreadful."

Twain's way of telling a story risks deadly silence for the satisfaction of slaying the audience: a benign exploitation of innocence; the pause, while the audience thinks "what th' ...?"; and then the snapper. That sort of rhythm can be sustained, and renewed, over the course of a sentence, a paragraph, a sketch, a speech, or an episode, but it isn't plot. Plot requires a larger structure and a somewhat quieter and more resounding resolution. What was wrong with Twain's skeleton-novelette project was that plot, the macro-mechanics of a work, is what he was worst at. "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage" is the only thing he ever wrote, I believe, in which events are resolved in venerable comic-plot tradition—by marriage. Indeed, the title suggests a traditional three-part structure, and the story seems to bear the title out. But the initial mystery—where the stranger came from—doesn't really have much bearing on the murder or the marriage. After the marriage the restless narra-

tive comes back to the original mystery by taking off after Jules Verne.

Twain's books tend to digress in all directions except when held together for a while by some unimposed force such as the Mississippi River. His stories are sketches or anecdotes, his novels episodic and unshapely. In life he was fascinated by machines, but they did not agree with him: he went broke backing a marvelous typesetting machine that fizzled. He was at his best—America's unequaled comic master—when language carried him along. "As long as a book would write itself," he wrote in one of his autobiographical ramblings, "I was a faithful and interested amanuensis and my industry did not flag, but the minute that the book tried to shift to *my* head the labor of contriving its situations, inventing its adventures and conducting its conversations, I put it away and dropped it out of my mind."

Perhaps he didn't want anything, even a book, to be what he was afraid *everything*—the death of his younger brother, the death of his sickly son, the death of his favorite daughter—was: his fault. In his dark moods he would blame God for not existing. (His extremely distant father died when he was eleven.)

In general he expected women, and Howells, and America, to coddle him. (His mother was fun-loving and relatively indulgent; his wife called him "Youth.") The humorous storyteller's strategy, as Twain wrote, is to feign innocence so as to

**In 1876, as a national consensus
sloshed a reconciliationist glaze over
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trip up the audience's. Perhaps the deeper purpose is to preserve the humorist's own. Was his story project a joke he hoped, consciously or unconsciously, to pull not so much on Jules Verne as on his American literary rivals? Was that why he was so determined to hand them a skeleton—and then stand back, innocently, and watch them wrestle with it? Were they wary of being sandbagged by his balloon?

Or was he struggling with some skeleton of his own? The tone of his story is anything but ingratiating. In the interrupted notebook sketch the townspeople who wonder at the man in the snow are unsophisticated but amiable, and open to outside information. They are not to be dismissed as people whose "hearts," to quote Twain's summary of Deer Lick's citizens, "were in hogs and corn." Laurence McClain, one of the few critics who have given much attention to "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage," has argued that it is the turning point in Twain's attitude toward Hannibal, Missouri, the village of his boyhood.

McClain points out that before this story, notably in *Tom Sawyer*, the fictional small towns that Twain modeled after Hannibal were "drowsy and peaceful," a challenge for a

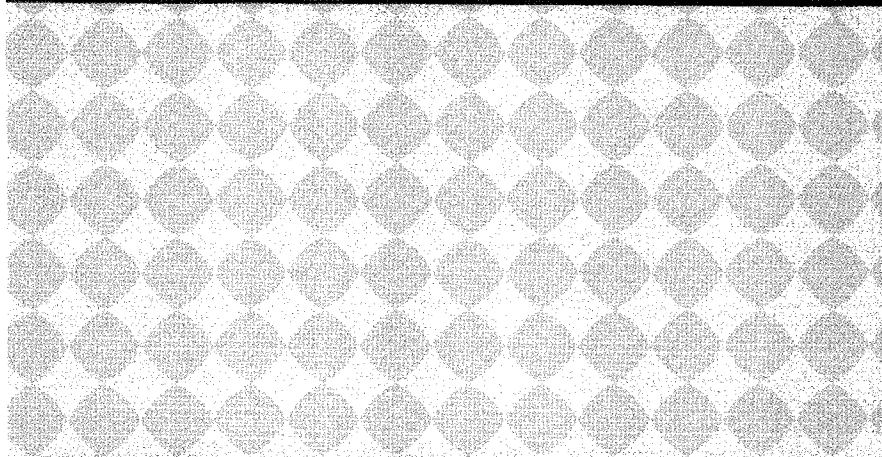
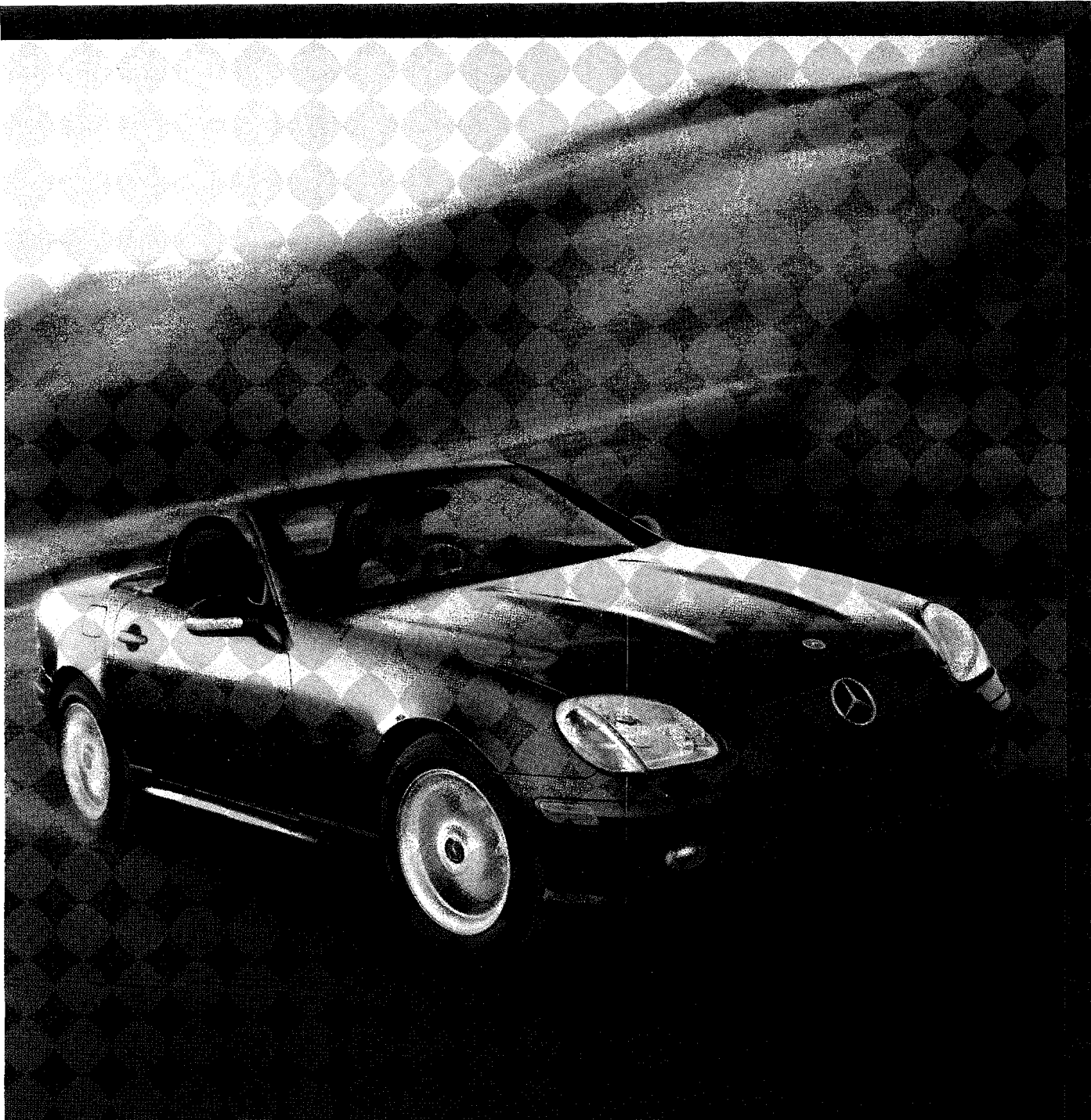


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mischievous boy but infused with “communal virtue and harmony,” in the light of which the boy hero wins universal approval. In *The Gilded Age* the inhabitants of Hawkeye, Missouri, are, in Twain’s words, “uncouth and not cultivated, and not particularly industrious; but they were honest and straightforward, and their virtuous ways commanded respect.” In “Old Times on the Mississippi” he described Hannibal as a “white town drowsing in the sunshine of a summer’s morning,” enlivened suddenly by the gladsome arrival of a steamboat. In the first half of *Huckleberry Finn*, as Henry Nash Smith has noted, “The image of Hannibal has lost its magical power to generate the sense of security that defines Tom [Sawyer]’s world. The dream of innocence has not entirely vanished, but is now associated not with the town but with the natural setting.”

Whereas everything in Deer Lick—except the snow and the featureless young lovers and the nick-of-time reprieve—is squalid. And the villagers that Huck Finn encounters down the river in the second half are mean, cowardly, greedy, lazy ...

What happened?

Let’s take a look at the evolution of Twain’s politics. When the Civil War broke out, shutting down commercial steamboat traffic on the Mississippi and ending his career as a pilot (he did not want to be impressed into military transport duty and be shot at from both sides of the river), Twain joined a volunteer brigade of the Confederate Army. After a couple of weeks he lit out for the far western territories, where he stayed until the fighting was well over. His politics right after the war may be inferred from entries in his notebook for 1868, just before and after the interrupted fallen-ballooner sketch. Before it, among notes from his recent voyage to California, we find his free interpretation of an uprising in the Colombian province of Panama (which he had crossed by train). American business interests, afraid that the Colombian government would seize the railroad,

hurried down to Panama with a cargo of wines & liquors, & at the end of 3 days had everybody drunk, a riot under way, the seeds of a promising revolution planted, & the Pres in prison. Result, the renewal of the lease to the Amer Co for 99 years, for \$1,000,000. There is nothing like knowing your men.

... all it is necessary to do is to cry Viva Revolucion! at head of street, & instantly is commotion. Doors slammed to, 50 soldiers march forth & cripple half dozen niggers in their shirt tails, a new Presi. is elevated, & then for 6 mos (till next Rev) the proud & happy survivors inquire eagerly of new comers what was said about it in Amer & Europe.

After the sketch, and a joke involving Indians and mustard, comes this with regard to domestic politics:

Political parties who accuse the one in power of gobbling the spoils &c, are like the wolf who looked in at the door & saw the shepherds eating mutton & said—

“Oh certainly—it’s all right as long as it’s *you*—but there’d be hell to pay if I was to do that!”

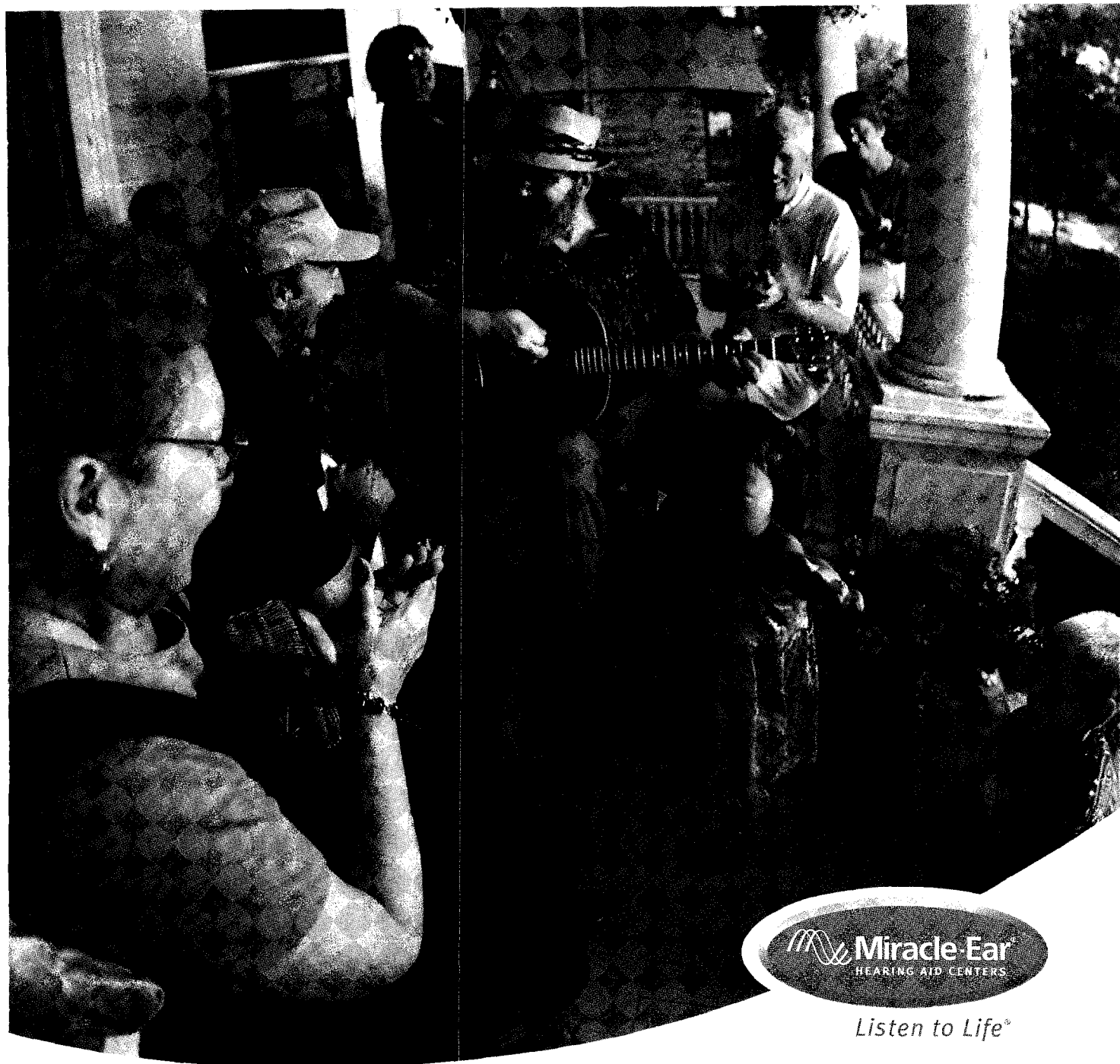
At that time the national political parties were the economy-minded Democrats and the more ideological Republicans. The Democrats were dominated by southerners, big-city political machines, and the Irish and other northerners who had been unenthusiastic about the war effort (the Irish because they couldn’t afford to avoid the draft) and had no desire to press Reconstruction. The radical Republicans controlled Congress, which had impeached and nearly deposed Lincoln’s successor, Andrew Johnson, of Tennessee, because he didn’t want to punish the South or grant full citizenship to former slaves. The Republicans elected Ulysses S. Grant, the former commander of the Union Army, to succeed Johnson in 1868. Twain the wild westerner had no dog in that fight.

But then he settled in Buffalo and married a woman from a staunch abolitionist family. For Livy he swore off liquor and tobacco (temporarily). He would “quit wearing socks,” he said, “if she thought them immoral.” Her father set him up financially. The literati around *The Atlantic* were solidly radical Republican. And so, by now, was Twain. Grant, whom he may have met briefly in late 1867, became his hero. And in fact he did take an interest in the Hayes-Tilden race—the first presidential campaign, he said, that he had cared about one way or the other. In August of 1876 Howells wrote Twain that he was working on a campaign biography of Hayes, who was his wife’s first cousin. Twain wrote back that Hayes’s letter to the Republican convention, accepting its nomination, “was amply sufficient to corral my vote without any further knowledge of the man.” Twain had been asked by Democrats in Jersey City “to be present at the raising of a Tilden ... flag there & take the stand & give them some ‘counsel.’ Well, I ... gave them counsel & advice ... as to the raising of the flag—advised them ‘not to raise it.’”

“Why don’t you come out with a letter, or speech, or something, for Hayes?” Howells replied. “I honestly believe that there isn’t another man in the country who could help him so much as you.”

Twain wrote back that he might, but not “until the opportunity comes in a natural, justifiable & unlogged way; & shall not then do anything unless I’ve got it all digested & worded just right ... When a humorist ventures upon the grave concerns of life he must do his job better than another man or he works harm to his cause.” But—losing all hesitancy—he urged Howells not to forget the skeleton-plot project. A few days later Twain wrote Howells to joke that Hayes ought to appoint an old poet friend of Twain’s—“poor, sweet, pure-hearted, good-intentioned, impotent”

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Charles Warren Stoddard—to a consulship, because he had “no worldly sense,” and advised Howells that Hayes’s victory was assured, because the mercurial Orion had suddenly become a Democrat, and possibly a “Mohammedan.”

On September 30 Twain did make a brief speech at a Republican rally in Hartford. According to newspaper accounts, he said he represented “the literary tribe,” who usually stayed out of politics but were backing Hayes because he stood for good government and a civil-service system based on merit, not political connections.

Our present civil system, born of General Jackson and the democratic party, is so idiotic, so contemptible, so grotesque, that it would make the very savages of Dahomey jeer and the very god of solemnity laugh ... We even require a plumber to know something [Laughter, and a pause by the speaker] about his business [More laughter], that he shall at least know which side of a pipe is the inside ... [Yet] we put the vast business of a custom house in the hands of a flathead who does not know a bill of lading from a transit of Venus [laughter and a pause]—never having heard of either of them before, [and entrusted the Treasury Department to] an ignorant villager who never before could wrestle with a two-weeks’ wash-bill without getting thrown.

The diplomatic corps, he said, spoke only English, and that by way of “flourishing the scalps of mutilated parts of speech.” There was even an ambassador “whose moral ceiling has a perceptible shady tint to it.”

Howells wrote him that he had made a big hit. Republican and Democratic newspapers alike had quoted his speech, and “Lowell was delighted with your hit at plumbers.”

“Of course the printers would leave off the word ‘gas-’ from ‘pipe’ in my remark about the plumbers,” Twain responded, “thus marring the music & clearness of the sentence.”

On Election Day, Twain wrote Howells that the inconclusive returns coming in made him “lift up my voice and swear.” Bret Harte, who had been his houseguest off and on for months (they had been writing a play together, and wearing out their friendship), astonished Twain by appearing to be “the only serene and tranquil voter in the United States.” Harte’s explanation was appalling: through connections he had been promised a consulship by both Hayes and Tilden. He couldn’t afford to vote at all, he said, because he might by chance vote for the loser, and the winner might find out. That was his only interest in the matter. Twain remained “an ardent Hayes fan.” Howells wrote to his father that Twain was “the most comfortable Republican I have met in a long while; hereabouts, you know, they are a very lukewarm brotherhood.”

Indeed they were, with regard to Reconstruction (if not plumbers). By 1876 the Republican Party had already lost interest in imposing that skeletal plot on the South. Hayes’s nomination-acceptance letter, which had so impressed

Twain, made that clear even as the election campaign began. Hayes campaigned for reconciliation, which meant letting the North and the South get together again on grounds of white supremacy.

In *The Gilded Age*, Twain and Warner had portrayed the character Colonel Sellers as delighted by the opportunities Reconstruction opened up—for graft. He wants to sell some Tennessee land to the government to build a college for freed slaves. As Ward Just has written about the novel’s portrait of the period, “There’s public money available for any project with ‘Negro’ or ‘Indian’ attached to it. The mantra throughout the book is the cry, ‘There’s millions in it!’” Twain might blame corruption in government on Jacksonian Democrats, but the public quite reasonably associated it with the scandal-ridden Republican Administration under Grant. In 1873 the sort of corruption and greed satirized in *The Gilded Age* had contributed to a financial panic and a severe national depression. Accordingly, voters in the 1874 congressional elections had replaced a 198–88 Republican majority in the House with a 169–109 Democratic one. In 1876 the Republicans were running scared. And as David W. Blight puts it in his new book, *Race and Reunion*, “No true national consensus ever gathered around the cause of black liberty and equality except as it was necessary to restoring and reimagining the republic itself. But Americans generally had run low on imagination about racial matters by [1876].”

What the Republicans wanted was to reconstruct their party. What white America wanted was to reconstruct the Union. And what Mark Twain wanted was to reconstruct himself.

As soon as Hayes was declared the winner, Twain started trying to lobby the White House, through Howells, for political appointments for people he knew (upstanding ones, to be sure). None of his candidates got anything. And when Twain heard that Harte, whom he had come to despise, was indeed under consideration, he denounced him in a letter he asked Howells to forward to Hayes. Howells, taking care that Twain should not hear about it, in fact put in a good word for Harte, who got a consular position in Germany. Twain was beside himself. “Harte,” he wrote to Howells, “is a liar, a thief, a swindler, a snob, a sot, a sponge, a coward, a Jeremy Diddler, he is brim full of treachery, & he conceals his Jewish birth as carefully as if he considered it a disgrace ... To send this nasty creature to puke upon the American name in a foreign land is too much.” He felt “personally snubbed” that the President had “silently ignored my testimony.”

In fact, Harte’s character (and writing) had deteriorated considerably, and would continue to do so, but Harte needed a job. Twain’s needs were greater—he needed America to hang on his word, which meant working out some sort of politics higher-minded than resentment of Bret Harte but

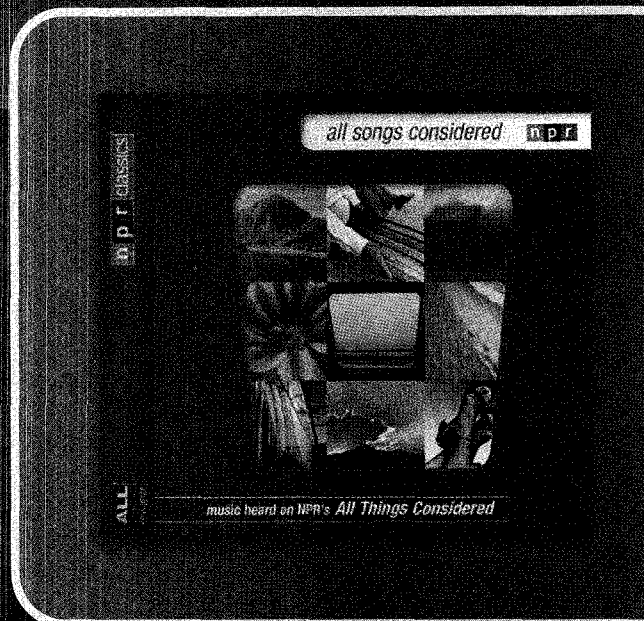
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less quixotic than demanding to know whatever happened to the goals of Reconstruction.

In office Hayes bore out Henry Adams's assessment of him as a "third-rate nonentity." When the Republicans nominated James Garfield, in 1880, Twain made a speech for him. After the election Twain wrote to remind Garfield that he had backed him, and to urge that the great runaway slave and abolitionist orator Frederick Douglass, whom he described as "a personal friend of mine," be kept on as marshal of the District of Columbia. Douglass, who did get another federal job, wrote Twain to thank him. In a speech to the Republican convention of 1876 Douglass had asked, "Do you mean to make good to us the promises in your constitution?" By 1880 he knew the answer: no. He described himself as a "field hand" for the Republican Party. Twain, for his part, had positioned himself well.

Then Garfield was assassinated and replaced by his Vice President, Chester A. Arthur—whose involvement in civil-service corruption Twain had mocked, implicitly, in his 1876 speech for Hayes. In 1884 Twain found a stance from which he could make fun in all directions: he became a Mugwump.

The Republican candidate for President, James Blaine, had been implicated in shady financial dealings. His Democratic opponent, Grover Cleveland, had fathered a child by a woman to whom he wasn't married—which disqualified him in Howells's eyes. But Twain wrote Howells,

To see grown men, apparently in their right mind, seriously arguing against a bachelor's fitness for President because he has had private intercourse with a consenting widow! Those grown men know what the bachelor's other alternative was [prostitutes, presumably]—& tacitly they seem to prefer that to the widow. Isn't human nature the most consummate sham & lie that was ever invented?

Be that as it might, Twain (though generally, in public, bluenosed about sex) forsook his party to vote for Cleveland, whom he chose to see as the candidate of reform. In so doing he joined a good and godly gang indeed. It included President Charles W. Eliot, of Harvard, and Charles

Francis Adams, of the Boston Adamses. Derided in the press as "little Mugwumps," *mugquomp* being an Algonquin Indian word for "chief," they began to call themselves Mugwumps with pride. The label suited Twain right down to the ground: it had a funny sound to it, and it connoted innocence. "We, the mugwumps, a little company made up of the unenslaved of both parties," he recalled in his *Autobiography*, "had no axes to grind."

Cleveland won, and Twain paid him a visit. Cleveland told him a joke. In *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* the narrator, Hank Morgan, hears the same joke from a knight:

It was one which I had heard attributed to every humorous person who had ever stood on American soil, from Columbus down to Artemus Ward. It was about a humorous lecturer who flooded an ignorant audience with the killingest jokes for an hour and never got a laugh; and then when he was leaving, some grey simpleton wrung him gratefully by the hand and said it had been the funniest thing they had ever heard and "it was all they could do to keep from laughin' right out in meetin'." That anecdote never saw the day that it was worth the telling; and yet I had sat under the telling of it hundreds and thousands and millions and billions of times, and cried and cursed all the way through.

Morgan has the knight hanged.

Twain had a friend in the diplomatic corps whom he wanted to recommend to Cleveland—but how could he do so and "save my mugwump purity undefiled"? His solution was to write in his friend's behalf to Cleveland's daughter, Ruth, not yet two years old. Cleveland assured him in a personal letter that his friend would keep his post.

When Twain's favorite daughter, Susy (on whom he modeled his portrait of Joan of Arc), was writing, in her teens, a biography of her father, she asked him for a statement about himself. He said, "I am a mugwump and a mugwump is pure from the marrow out." In a speech in 1900 he would refer to himself in the third person as the last mugwump left—"a Grand Old Party all by himself." By that time the Republican President was a whippersnapper named Teddy Roosevelt, whose imperialism Twain scorned (he called TR a Tom Sawyer type). Democratic-leaning publications that had tended to give Twain little attention were now asking for interviews on issues of the day, which he granted liberally. Sometimes, in interviews and in writing, he vented outrage against the oppression of the weak, but generally the oppressors he attacked were in other countries. His "The United States of Lyncherdom" was a blistering book-length attack, but he agreed with his publisher that he'd better not put it out in his lifetime, for fear of alienating southern book buyers. (It came out in 1923.)

By 1906, when he was dictating the long autobiographical ramblings that still have not been published in full, his aspersions were on mankind in general—though he argued

BIKER

Pulling away from a stoplight
with a tire's sharp bark,
he lifts his scuffed boot and kicks at the air,
and the old dog of inertia gets up with a growl
and shrinks out of the way.

—TED KOOSER

that human nature couldn't help it, that mankind was a machine shaped by forces it couldn't control. His thinking on the 1876 election had swung around to the point where he looked on its outcome as "one of the Republican party's most cold-blooded swindles of the American people, the stealing of the presidential chair from Mr. Tilden, who had been elected, and the conferring of it upon Mr. Hayes, who had been defeated." He wrote, "I have since convinced myself that the political opinions of a nation are of next to no value, in any case."

Reconstruction didn't figure into his recollection. After he died, in 1910, muttering something about Jekyll and Hyde, the nation mourned. The last words of Howells's tribute, *My Mark Twain*, set him not among but above all the writers Twain could have wanted to gang up with: "Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes—I knew them all and all the rest of our sages, poets, seers, critics, humorists; they were like one another and like other literary men; but Clemens was sole, incomparable, the Lincoln of our literature."

But by failing to respond as we might expect to the historical moment of 1876, hadn't our literary Lincoln failed to carry on the truth of the Emancipation Proclamation? No. In 1876, as a national consensus sloshed a reconciliationist glaze over the issues left unresolved in the aftermath of slavery, Mark Twain's writing began to grow darker—in "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage." He began to acknowledge that the roots of his innocence were in a village corrupted by slavery. In the second half of *Huckleberry Finn* good-natured people are abused over and over again by meanness, callousness, and violence. Throughout the rest of his writing career the great pursuit of America's greatest humorist was to snatch empathetic comedy from the jaws of intentional and unintentional cruelty. Many of his contemporaries achieved great popularity by writing nostalgically about the culture of slavery. We can see right through their work today. And by today's standards Twain's racial attitudes were often embarrassingly still under construction—but his writing hangs on to a raw innocence that burns away smugness. The radical-Republican Reconstruction was an imposed plot that wouldn't take hold. Mark Twain's personal reconstruction is tricky, awkward, and still alive.

In *Huckleberry Finn*, just before Twain's writing hiatus, Huck plays a mean trick on Jim. Huck has been separated from the raft in a storm, and Jim has gone to sleep grief-stricken because he thinks Huck has drowned. When Jim wakes up and finds to his delight that Huck is back on the raft, Huck convinces him that he dreamed the entire episode. When Jim realizes that his good nature has been taken advantage of, he tells Huck that "*trash* ... is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed ..."

"It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to

go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it," Huck says, "and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards."

Jim's joy, Huck's cruelty, Jim's credulousness, Jim's indignation, Huck's pride, and Huck's apology and relief—all different forms of innocence bouncing off one another on a field of shame.

Why, after all, was Twain so obsessed with purity? Some childhood issue, no doubt—and for him that's what slavery was. One night when he was four he was kept awake by the groans of a runaway slave who had been captured, beaten, and tied up in a shack near his house. While still a boy he was out in a boat on the river when the mutilated body of another slave rose to the surface before his eyes. In 1896 he was checking into a Bombay hotel when "a burly German" who worked there saw a hotel servant doing something to his dissatisfaction.

Without *explaining* what was wrong [he] gave the native a brisk cuff on the jaw and *then* told him where the defect was ... The native took it with meekness ... not showing in his face or manner any resentment. I had not seen the like of this for fifty years. It carried me back to my boyhood, and flashed upon me the forgotten fact that this was the *usual* way of explaining one's desires to a slave. I was able to remember that the method seemed right and natural to me in those days ... but I was also able to remember that those unresented cuffings made me sorry for the victim and ashamed for the punisher ... When I was ten years old I saw a man fling a lump of iron-ore at a slave-man in anger, for merely doing something awkwardly ... It bounded from the man's skull, and the man fell and never spoke again. He was dead in an hour. I knew the man had a right to kill his slave if he wanted to, and yet it seemed ... somehow wrong ... Nobody in the village approved of that murder, but of course no one said much about it ...

For just one second, all that goes to make the *me* in me was in a Missourian village, on the other side of the globe ... and the next second I was back in Bombay, and that kneeling native's smitten cheek was not done tingling yet!

Murder, mystery, and—between North and South, black and white, First World and Third—a marriage of sorts. After the Civil War, Twain moved, through his connection with *The Atlantic*, to purge himself of the stigma of Southernness—not *his fault*—that tainted him in the eyes of respectable literary society. Then he found that America, from Boston on out, wanted to forget the shame of slavery. Deftly though he maneuvered to fix himself thereafter in the national mind, in *his* mind the shame rose more and more to the surface. "The skin of every human being," he wrote, "contains a slave." He could at least make America flinch before it laughed. He kept trying to reconstruct and deconstruct the smiting of innocence, and the shuddering silence that follows it. ■



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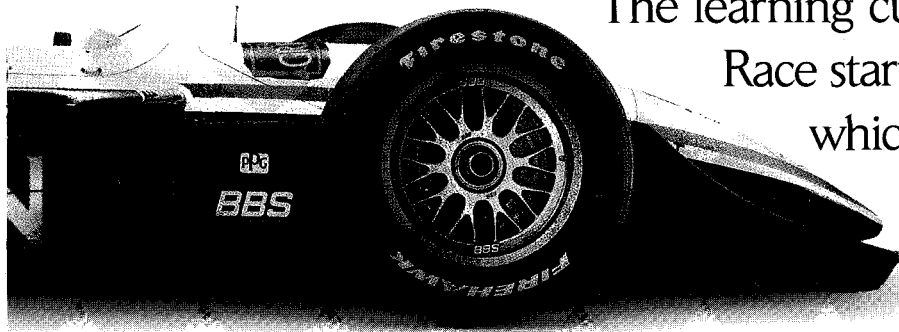
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GRAHAM GREENE'S VATICAN DOSSIER

Documents from the archives of the Holy See reveal the deliberations among papal censors over how to deal with The Power and the Glory—and wise counsel from an unexpected source

BY PETER GODMAN

.....

"In common with many Catholics," Graham Greene wrote in a letter to *The Times* of London in June of 1954, "I have little regard for the Index in the rare cases in which it deals with imaginative writing ... So far as imaginative literature is concerned (according to rumor both Tolstoy and Lewis Carroll have been condemned) most Catholic laymen follow their own consciences." Greene was ostensibly responding to a letter in *The Times* that had drawn a comparison between the Roman Index and prosecutions for obscenity in British courts. What readers of the newspaper could not have known was that Greene himself had just been sternly reproached by Church authorities. Greene alluded to this episode in later writings. The records of the deliberations at the Vatican over his novel *The Power and the Glory*, first published in 1940, have recently come to light. They provide a rare glimpse into the exercise of what was once a great power, and one of particular interest in the history of twentieth-century literature—the power of the Church to ban the books it deemed dangerous or offensive.

The Vatican had sought for centuries to wield influence over various kinds of writing; in 1571, at the height of the Counter-Reformation, it established the Congregation of the Index, a department responsible for censoring and even banning books (when it had some power over the author or the publication process), or at the very least for telling Catholics which books they simply shouldn't read. The Congregation of the Index was abolished in 1917, but censorship continued to be exercised by another department, the Holy Office, and an official Index of Forbidden Books was maintained until 1966.

How did the Holy Office operate during a tense and troubled period in recent history such as the Cold War? What was its policy toward Catholic authors? To what extent was it informed about new developments in scholar-



ship and literature? What kinds of internal disagreements did the department experience? Such questions are prompted by the cases of a number of twentieth-century writers, some of whom were converts to the Church of Rome. Greene was one of these. In the introduction to a later edition of *The Power and the Glory* he wrote,

The Archbishop of Westminster read me a letter from the Holy Office condemning my novel because it was "paradoxical" and "dealt with extraordinary circumstances." The price of liberty, even within a Church, is eternal vigilance, but I wonder whether any of the totalitarian states ... would have treated me as gently when I refused to revise the book on the casuistical ground that the copyright was in the hands of my publishers. There was no public condemnation, and the affair was allowed to drop into that peaceful oblivion which the Church wisely reserves for unimportant issues.

In July of 1965 Greene had an audience with Pope Paul VI. He told the Pope that *The Power and the Glory* had been condemned by the Holy Office. According to Greene, the Pope asked, "Who condemned it?" Greene replied, "Cardinal Pizzardo." Paul VI repeated the name with a wry smile and added, "Mr. Greene, some parts of your book are certain to offend some Catholics, but you should pay no attention to that."

These sentences have intrigued me ever since I first read them, some years ago, in Greene's *Ways of Escape*. The records of censorial investigations undertaken after the death of Leo XIII, in 1903, are in the archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and are not available to be consulted by outside scholars. In February of last year I sought and obtained an audience with the

BETTMANN/CORBIS

Congregation's prefect, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. To my request that an exception be made to the rules, the reply was one word, uttered without hesitation: "Ja."

The *Power and the Glory* is set in the southern-Mexican state of Tabasco, which is governed by a ruthless persecutor of Catholics, Tomas Garrido Canabal. It is based on a journey to Mexico that Greene made in 1938. An atheist and a puritan, Canabal detested organized religion and alcohol. The central figure in Greene's book is a whiskey priest, who is put to death by Canabal's police at the end of the novel. The priest, whose prime quality is self-knowledge, is his own strongest critic. Although he anticipates his execution, and knows that he is walking into a trap, he chooses to perform what he sees as his duty and attempts to give the last sacraments to a fatally wounded criminal. The priest puts the chance of saving another man's soul ahead of his own survival. Is this martyrdom? Or is it retribution for moral lapses? The moral and theological criteria of *The Power and the Glory* are ambiguous—so ambiguous that self-appointed censors have sniffed an odor of heresy in the book.

Denunciation or inquiry was the usual means by which news reached Rome of a book that deserved investigation. In the case of *The Power and the Glory*, the news traveled circuitously. Its point of departure was Einsiedeln, in Switzerland. There, in 1949, the Catholic publisher Benziger was planning to bring out a German translation of the novel. Alarmed by the "polemic" that he claimed Greene's book was raising in France, a Swiss priest asked the Holy Office for its opinion. Pressure slowly mounted over the years from other parts of Europe, and finally, in April of 1953, Rome looked into the matter closely. Greene's case was examined (as were similar cases involving Evelyn Waugh and Bruce Marshall). The Holy Office appointed two consultants to consider *The Power and the Glory*. The first of these wrote in Italian, and he displayed his bewilderment at differences of culture and outlook. Greene's mentality was "odd and paradoxical, a true product of the disturbed, confused, and audacious character of today's civilization," he wrote. "For me, the book is sad." Sadness and sorrow, rather than anger and indignation, colored his tone. The work's title implies an emphasis on God's power and glory, but as the consultant read the book itself, he found only a barren landscape of despair. "Immoral" or married priests; the ambiguity with which the central figure refers to God and the doctrines of the faith; the conviction or the virtue attributed to Protestants and atheists—all this made it impossible for Greene's first reader in the Holy Office to see why the book was regarded as excellent literature. "Troubling the spirit of calm that should prevail in a Christian," *The Power and the Glory*, in his judgment, ought never to have been written. Since the novel had been written, and published, and widely disseminated, the consultant

hoped that its fame was already in decline. A condemnation would do no good, because the author, with his "paradoxical modes of thought," would probably not accept it, and the repercussions of an intellectual condemnation could be dangerous, given the author's fame. Better, the consultant recommended, to have Graham Greene "admonished" by his bishop and "exhorted to write other books in a different tone, attempting to correct the defects of this one."

The opinion of the second consultant, delivered in Latin, supported that of the first. Both readers acknowledged that Greene was not only the leading Catholic novelist in England but also a convert from Protestantism. Despite his many failings, the comfort he offered to enemies of the Church, and his "abnormal propensity toward ... situations in which one kind of sexual immorality or another plays a role," it would not do to put him on the Index, because his book was a best seller. The second censor therefore concurred that Greene should be told that "literature of this kind does harm to the cause of the true religion," and that "in the future he should behave more cautiously when he writes."

The mind-set of Rome's censors was not malevolent. It is difficult, however, to resist the conclusion that it was dim. Defensive about their authority (which they desired to assert even as they doubted its efficacy), and incapable of grasping the conceptual problems posed by Greene's writing, they could be checked in their course only by intervention from above. That intervention came on October 1, 1953, in the form of a confidential letter written by a highly placed colleague in the Vatican's Secretariat of State. It was a protest addressed to Giuseppe Cardinal Pizzardo, the secretary of the Holy Office.

Years ago, I had occasion to read [*The Power and the Glory*] which a priest had pointed out to me as a highly significant work of contemporary romantic literature. It is indeed a book of singular literary value.

I see that it is judged a sad book. I have no objection to make to the just observations in the [censure of] this work. But it seems to me that, in such a judgment, there is lacking a sense of the work's substantial merits. They lie, fundamentally, in its high quality of vindication, by revealing a heroic fidelity to his own ministry within the innermost soul of a priest who is in many respects reprehensible; and the reader is led to esteem the priesthood even if exercised by abject representatives ... I venture this opinion because I incline to think that it would be well to have the book examined by another consultant (Monsignor De Luca?) before passing a negative judgment on it, not least because author and book are known worldwide ...

Tact, sensitivity, insight—this letter reflects a different order of intelligence from that displayed in the censures on which it comments. Its author was the Vatican's pro-Secretary of

State for ordinary affairs. His name was Giovanni Battista Montini, and in 1963 he would become Pope Paul VI.

Why did Montini stand up for Greene? An intellectual whom John XXIII is said to have likened to Hamlet, Montini was alive to the problem of moral ambiguity. He was capable of discerning links between apparent contraries where less perceptive others saw none. Montini was not only a reader of refined literary tastes but also a collector of literary manuscripts. Among them figured the handwritten original of a booklet on Saint Dominic by Georges Bernanos, which ends with the sentence "There is only one sadness—not to be a saint." Montini treasured that work, echoes of which he cannot have failed to hear in *The Power and the Glory*. The words "He knew now that ... there was only one thing that counted—to be a saint" come at the very end of the penultimate chapter of Greene's novel.

As Montini recommended, Greene's case was forwarded to Monsignor Giuseppe De Luca for a second opinion. De Luca was a loyal churchman (in 1952 he had drafted the condemnation of André Gide) but also a maverick (he wrote articles for an Italian Communist newspaper). He found the Holy Office stultifying. "In this suffocating atmosphere of unctuous and arrogant imbecility," De Luca wrote to Montini in June of 1953, "perhaps a scream—chaotic but Christian—would do some good." On November 30, 1953, De Luca addressed the following memorandum to the Holy Office.

Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh, according to expert opinion, are to be considered the two major living English novelists: being Catholic they do credit to Rome's faith, and they do credit to it in a country that is of Protestant civilization and culture. How can Rome be gruff and cruel? They are the successors of Chesterton and Belloc and, like them, rather than attempting to convert the small fry, strive to influence superior intelligences and the spirit of the age in a manner favorable to Catholicism. Their level, unlike that of a Bruce Marshall, is not that of average I.Q.s or, like the clergy in general, that of uneducated readers or pure professionals. Their level is the higher intelligentsia in the contemporary world which they sway and influence towards Rome ...

This is not a matter of heresy or even a scandal; it has nothing to do with theologians or depraved persons. We are dealing with great writers, who are often naïve and obstinate like children, in states of mind that are, from time to time, not inclined to praise but gloomy, not exultant but insistent, and such states of mind are familiar to everyone. To see them being expressed with such crudeness may occasionally cause surprise and even consternation, but in the end it is a delight.

To condemn or even to deplore them would be looked askance at in England, and would deal a grievous blow to our prestige: it would demonstrate not only that we are behind the times but also that our judgment

is light-weight, undermining significantly the authority of the clergy which is regarded—rightly—as unlettered bondslaves to puerile literature in bad taste. The crew should not be confused with the pilot: today great writers are the real pilots of much of mankind and when the Lord, in His mercy, sends us one, even if he is a nuisance, let's not make a Jonah of him; let's not throw him to the fishes. At the right moment (for they are not bad men), they will yield place to the true pilots—i.e.: to the priests.

In the case of Graham Greene, his harsh and acerbic art touches the hearts of the least receptive and reminds them, however gloomy they be, of the awe-inspiring presence of God and the poisonous bite of sin. He addresses those who are most distant and hostile—those whom we will never reach ...

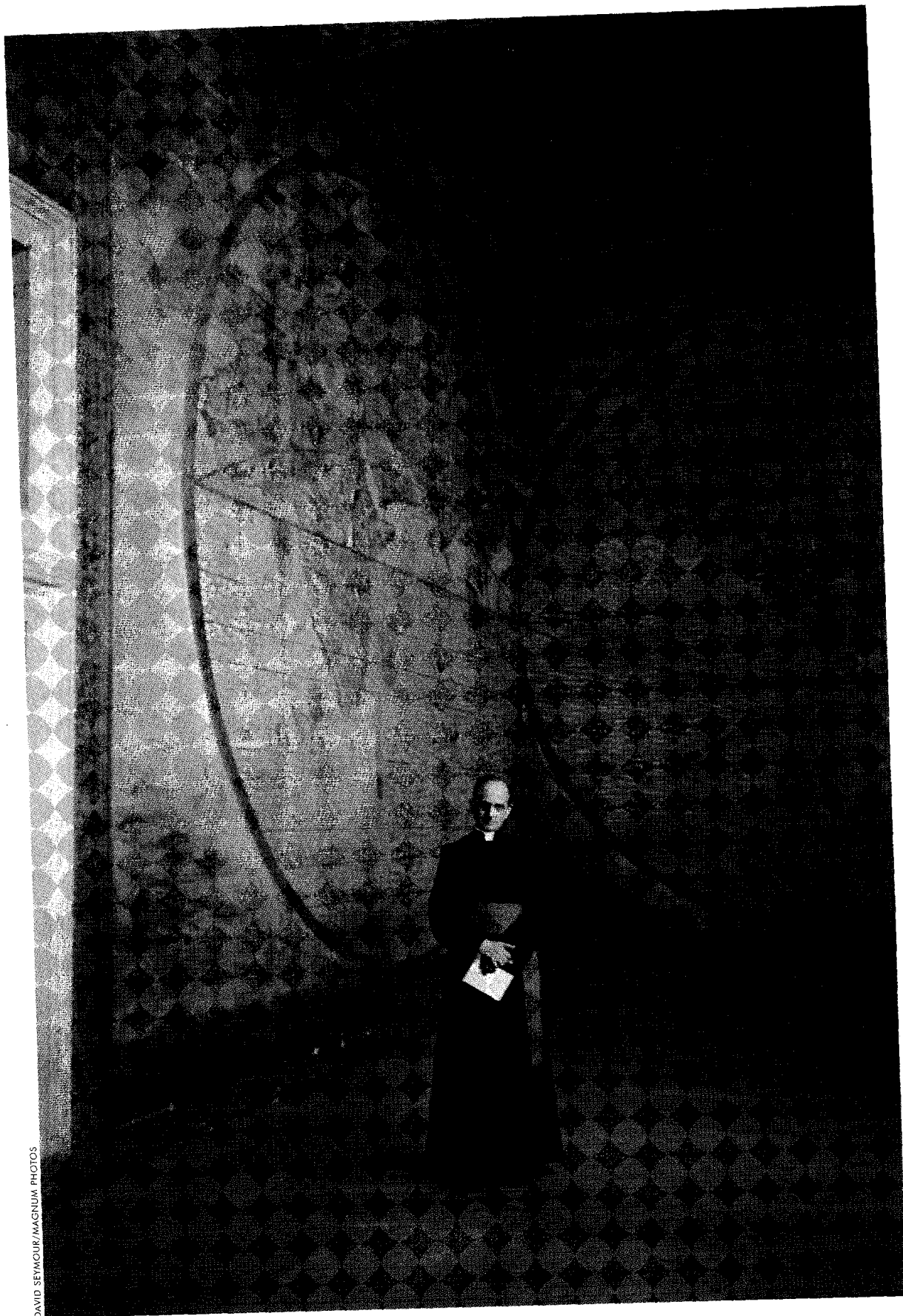
This priest in touch with contemporary culture inveighed against those in the Holy Office who were not. His arguments, however, came too late. The Holy Office had already written, on November 17, to Cardinal Griffin of Westminster. Griffin was instructed to inform Graham Greene of the Holy Office's "negative judgment," to "exhort him to lend a more constructive tone to his books, from a Catholic point of view," and to advise him not to authorize reprints or translations of *The Power and the Glory* without making "suitable corrections ... in light of the preceding observations."

Griffin immediately issued a pastoral letter deploring "certain trends in contemporary literature." Without mentioning Greene's name, the cardinal continued,

It is sadly true that a number of Catholic writers appear to have fallen into this error. Indeed, novels which purport to be the vehicle for Catholic doctrine frequently contain passages which, by their unrestrained portrayal of immoral conduct, prove a source of temptation to many of their readers. Though it may well be that such literature can be read in safety by the select few, so great is the danger to the virtue of the majority that its general publication is most undesirable.

Such, we may be sure, was also the tenor of Griffin's private remarks to Greene at the audience Griffin granted the novelist a few months later, in April of 1954. Greene commented on that meeting in the above-cited introduction to *The Power and the Glory*. In the archives of the Holy Office is an intriguing letter from Greene to Cardinal Pizzardo, written less than a month after the meeting with Griffin. It is a skillful political document, written in a tone of submission that I believe was feigned (the delicious slyness of Greene's paragraph suggesting that the Vatican take the matter up with his publishers gives the game away), and taking pains to refer to communism in a way that would be certain to

Opposite: Giovanni Battista Montini, 1949



DAVID SEYMOUR/MAGNUM PHOTOS

register positively with both Pizzardo and his superior, Alfredo Cardinal Ottaviano.

It is not without hesitation that I presume to address Your Eminence: but, in the present delicate situation, I have grounds, it seems to me, to present you with an account of the facts.

On 9 April, during an audience which His Eminence Cardinal Griffin, Archbishop of Westminster, granted me, he handed me the copy of a letter which Your Eminence had written to him on 16 November. The delay in the communication of this document is due to my absence from London: I was in Indochina, where I was doing my utmost to make world opinion, for which my articles are intended, understand the difficulties faced by the heroic Catholics of Indochina confronted with the Communist menace.

I wish to emphasize that, throughout my life as a Catholic, I have never ceased to feel deep sentiments of personal attachment to the Vicar of Christ, fostered in particular by admiration for the wisdom with which the Holy Father has constantly guided God's Church. I have always been vividly impressed by the high spirituality which characterizes the Government of Pius XII. Your Eminence knows that I had the honor of a private audience during the holy year 1950. I shall retain my impression of it until my last breath. Your Eminence will therefore understand how distraught I am to learn that my book *The Power and the Glory* has been the object of criticism from the Holy Office. The aim of the book was

to oppose the power of the sacraments and the indestructibility of the Church on the one hand with, on the other, the merely temporal power of an essentially Communist state.

May I remind Your Eminence that this book was written in 1938–39 before the menace which I myself witnessed in Mexico spread to Western Europe?

I beg Your Eminence, in conclusion, to consider the fact that the book was published 14 years ago and, consequently, the rights have passed from my hands into those of publishers in different countries. In addition, the translations to which Your Eminence's letter refers appeared for the most part several years ago and no new translation is envisaged.

I am sending His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster the names of the publishers concerned. They alone have the right to reprint.

I wish to assure Your Eminence of my profound respect for any communication emanating from the Sacred Congregation of the Index ...

Your most humble and devoted servant
Graham Greene

Three weeks after Greene had written his letter, Cardinal Ottaviano—he who had gleefully proclaimed his readiness to excommunicate any Catholic who voted for the Communists—scrawled on it that Cardinal Griffin had told him that the Holy Office should “understand and excuse” this right-thinking convert. And that is what was done. ■

LILY AND BRONZE

Zenith June and this tower:
seventeen white throats
opening a tier at a time

to interiors purely narcotic—

I mean the lily's giddy spire,
each trumpet nothing
but intent to drench

in scent and pollen
any approaching face.
Look at them,

the full flare of them,
and your looking empties out;

turn back and there they are,
blazing; they go on arriving,
as if nothing ended but our attention.

Like those horses in Venice,
the *quadriga*, four Roman bronzes
stolen to Constantinople,

robbed again to Venice,
mounted on the facade of the basilica
eight hundred years,

then brought in from
the chemical rain,
restant and looming,

in a brick vault I entered
through a little door—
I, I say, but I wasn't then,

but suddenly bright faces tilted
just to one side, turbulent, breathing
and *O for the speech to make you*

*the muscle and push of it,
a bronze mouth for the heft
and thunderhead,*

sweat and fierce of them—

It's the same with the lilies:
look hard enough and they hurry
ceaseless toward a place where

you are no longer standing,
their flanks also dusted
in scoured gold. Seconds only,

until the moment collapses
and you turn away. Though
they go on unfolding,

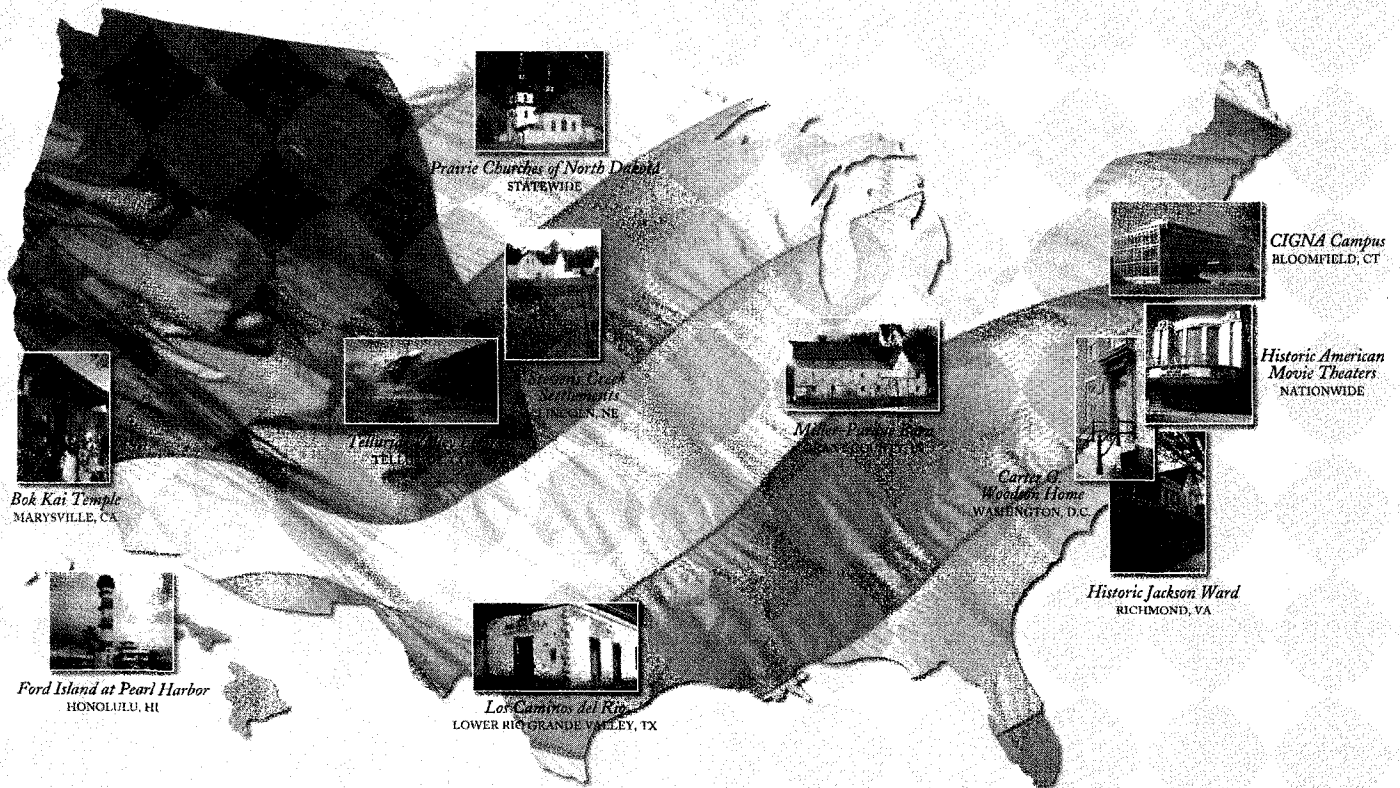
in a great arrested suspension: leap
and stasis fused.

—MARK DOTY

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NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION ANNOUNCES

America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places 2001



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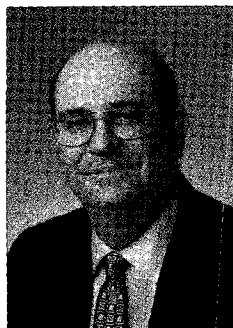
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For more than fifty years, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has been dedicated to "protecting the irreplaceable." The National Trust's efforts have ensured that the places that capture the spirit, culture, and architecture of our nation's past will be accessible to future generations. Their mission is similar to Shell's own commitment.

Shell understands the importance of safeguarding the world's precious resources, and we are proud to sponsor the National Trust's 2001 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. Through the efficient use of energy and the development of cleaner technologies, Shell strives to provide communities with a healthy environment today and for years to come. Beyond responsible energy development, we support a variety of preservation and conservation efforts, ranging from restoring wetlands throughout the nation to protecting the delicate marine environment of the Gulf of Mexico.

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On behalf of everyone at Shell, I congratulate the National Trust for their longstanding allegiance to protecting America's heritage. We are privileged to be your sponsor.



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven L. Miller".

Steven L. Miller
Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer
Shell Oil Company

America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places 2001

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a private, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to protecting the irreplaceable. With more than a quarter-million members nationwide, it provides leadership, education, and advocacy to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize communities. The Trust has six regional offices and twenty historic sites and works with thousands of local community groups across the country. Since 1988, its annual list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places has identified more than one hundred and twenty sites. Whether these sites are urban districts or rural landscapes, single buildings or entire communities, the list spotlights historic places across America that are threatened by neglect, insufficient funds, inappropriate development, or insensitive public policy. While listing does not ensure the protection of a site or guarantee funding, the designation has been a powerful tool for raising awareness and rallying resources to save threatened places nationwide. The History Channel® will feature the list on Saturday, July 7, 2001, at 10 P.M. ET/PT, in a one-hour documentary special entitled "America's Most Endangered." The show will be hosted by Josh Binswanger, also host of "This Week in History."

Historic American Movie Theaters

NATIONWIDE

Since the birth of the motion-picture age more than a century ago, millions of Americans have flocked to downtown theaters for the latest films. Historic theaters—such as the Senator Theater, in Baltimore, Maryland—with their art deco, Egyptian, and Chinese motifs, were designed to transport audiences to fanciful, faraway places. But in the multiplex era, as chain theater companies gained influence over distribution companies, independent theaters had difficulties competing with the larger chains. Since multiplexes can show more movies to smaller audiences, they don't need a full house to make money. But independent movie theaters, which have higher operating costs to begin with, typically have hundreds or even thousands of seats per screen; and when theaters aren't full, it's harder for them to compete with suburban multiplexes for first-run films. Historic theaters often are forced to close, causing local economies to suffer at the loss of these Main Street anchors.

Independent historic movie theaters can be profitable, but increased access to first-run movies is essential for their success. However, if a theater must close, it doesn't have to be demolished. Adaptive reuse can

save a theater's unique architecture—but reuse must be approached carefully to make it possible for the theater to be returned one day to its original function. Theaters are often adapted as performing-arts centers, live-entertainment venues, and even churches. Such uses can honor the theaters' architectural heritage and keep the buildings centers of community life.

Bok Kai Temple

MARYSVILLE, CA

On the north shore of the Yuba River, in the heart of northern California's Sacramento Valley, stands the Bok Kai Temple, a testament to the power of tradition. Constructed in 1880 by Chinese immigrants, the temple long served a flourishing Chinese community first attracted to

the area by the California gold rush. The temple's center hall has gilded altars, painted statuary, and elaborately embroidered ceremonial banners and lanterns. Magnificent multicolored wall paintings, thought to be the only ones of their kind in the United States, adorn the temple's exterior walls. Since

its construction, the temple has continuously been used as a house of worship and a community meeting place.

But years of water damage have rotted the temple's structure and threaten



Bok Kai Temple

its decorative features. Cracks have appeared in the paintings, and pieces of the delicate painted plaster walls have disintegrated. Unfortunately, Marysville faces significant economic challenges, and its now dispersed Chinese community lacks the resources to restore the temple and its collection. A coalition of community groups, including the temple's owner, the Marysville Chinese Community Association, is working together to save the temple. The groups have joined with Marysville city leaders and other concerned individuals to seek funding for the temple's preservation. Restoration architects and engineers have been hired to evaluate the structure's condition and will make recommendations for addressing the most immediate concerns.



Senator Theater



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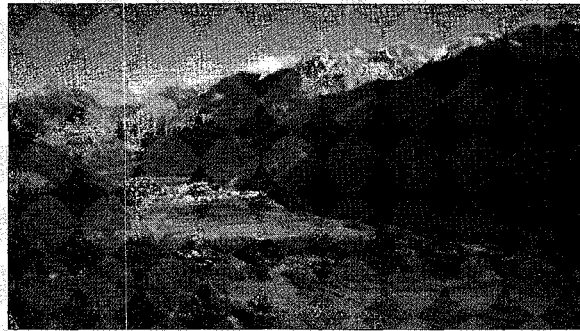
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Telluride Valley Floor

TELLURIDE, CO

Telluride is one of the Rocky Mountains' most popular vacation spots. But that popularity has brought sprawling development to the mountains. Nestled among 14,000-foot peaks, Telluride is cradled in a wide valley that, until now, remained as peaceful as when the Ute Indians hunted there. The valley was granted to the Utes in 1868, and became overrun with miners in the early 1870s. The first mining camp grew into a town called San Miguel City, whose properties soon grew too expensive for the average miner. In response, Telluride, a mile up the valley, was born. The railroad came to town in 1890, sharing the valley with a few dairies. Now a massive resort is being planned for the 880-acre valley floor, threatening the region's historic context and forever altering one of the Rocky Mountains' last intact mining towns.

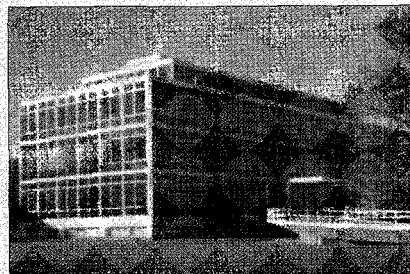
The land changed hands over the years, ending up in the hands of the San Miguel Valley Corporation, which plans to develop a large hotel complex, a gondola, a golf course, commercial space, and housing. Booming tourism has led to increased pressure to develop the area. Yet the very qualities that make Telluride unique will be profoundly compromised by the development. To protect the valley, preservationists and the town are seeking funds to buy the land and give it legal protection.



Telluride Valley Floor

Style, and set in a lush landscape of sculpture-studded lawns, the Connecticut General building set the pattern for suburban office parks for the remainder of the twentieth century, and received an Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects in 1958; the Emhart building received the same award six years later.

Now CIGNA Corporation, the owner of both buildings, claims that the landmarks have outlived their usefulness and are too large and expensive to refit; it wants to tear them down and turn the beautifully landscaped site into a sprawling complex of offices, stores, and houses clustered around a golf course. A hotel and clubhouse is slated to replace the Connecticut General building, while residential development will occupy the site of the Emhart building. Preservationists believe that these contemporary icons could serve as centerpieces of the new development, and a new



CIGNA Campus

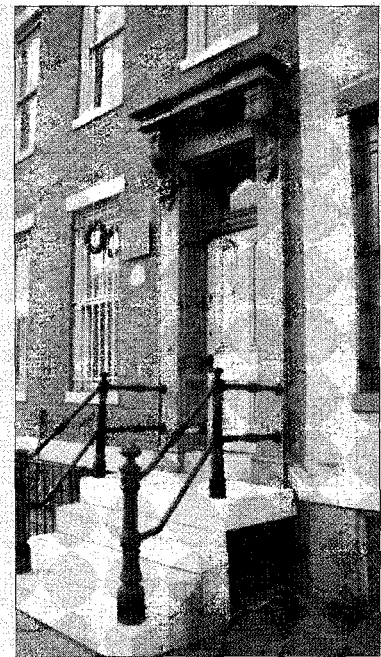
plan is needed that would recognize the significance of the buildings and allow them to remain in active use.

Carter G. Woodson Home

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Eighty-five years after Carter G. Woodson founded the black history

movement, the Washington home where he lived and worked sits abandoned, an ironic legacy of the man who spent his life preserving African-American history and culture. The Victorian 1890s red-brick rowhouse with the broken windows and overgrown yard sits squarely in the middle of D.C.'s Shaw neighborhood, a richly historic area undergoing a renaissance. While many of Shaw's grand old homes and classic rowhouses have been rehabilitated, the Woodson home awaits rescue. Woodson, the son of former slaves, and an acclaimed scholar and educator, lived and



Carter G. Woodson Home

worked in this modest rowhouse from 1915 to 1950. His home is the crown jewel of Shaw—a neighborhood that has been called the heart of black Washington because as many as seventy sites have been singled out for their significance in the city's African-American heritage.

The home has been abandoned for nearly a decade, and requires immediate rehabilitation. It is currently owned by the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History, a non-profit publisher. It has suffered extensive interior damage, including structural deterioration caused by water leaks in a number of locations. The association hopes to restore the property, use it as its headquarters, and open it to the public to showcase the life and work of Carter Woodson.

Courtesy of Association for the Study of African-American Life and History

CIGNA Campus

BLOOMFIELD, CT

When, in 1957, the headquarters of the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company was completed in Bloomfield,

Connecticut, it was immediately recognized as a milestone in the history of modern architecture. Five years later, similar praise was heaped on the headquarters of the Emhart Corpora-



Count on Shell

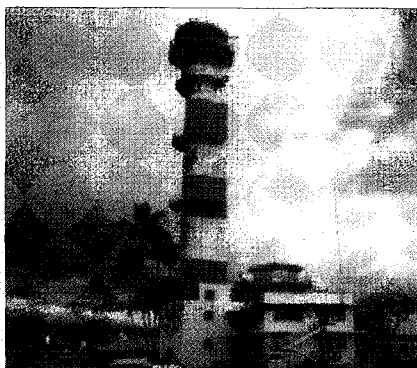
Ford Island at Pearl Harbor

HONOLULU, HI

The December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor is seared into the memory of Americans through depictions in photographs, books, and movies. Ford Island, the centerpiece of Pearl Harbor's National Historic Landmark District, is adjacent to Battleship Row, the berthing place of the USS *Missouri*, and a few yards away from the memorial to the USS *Arizona*, which sus-

tained the heaviest loss of life that day. Remnants of bomb craters and signs of the Japanese aircraft's strafing runs are still visible. The original airfield, the air tower, World War II air hangars, a collection of bungalows, officers' housing, and landscaping with mature Banyan trees remain on the site. Yet these historic resources could be altered forever if there is inadequate planning to protect them.

In 1999, the National Trust and the Historic Hawaii Foundation learned that the U.S. Navy was planning to build a large housing development and commercial and recreational facilities on Ford Island. Despite ongoing efforts by both preservation organizations since then—including nearly two years of discussions—there has been no resolution re-



Ford Island at Pearl Harbor

garding the landmark's future. The Navy has asked potential developers to be sensitive to the island's historic character,

but the Navy's need for new facilities has caused it to move forward without completing the preservation planning needed for one of the nation's most significant twentieth-century landmarks.

Miller-Purdue Barn

GRANT COUNTY, IN



Miller-Purdue Barn

They are feasts for the unhurried, appreciative eye: historic barns, like the Miller-Purdue barn in northeast Indiana, add life and color to the rural landscape. Built in the 1850s by an Indiana farm family, the Miller-Purdue barn is a three-gabled structure with five cupolas. It was used by the Miller family for almost a century and then was given, with the property on which it sits, to Purdue University, in 1940. In the late 1980s, the farm was bought by an Indiana farmer, Wayne Townsend.

In recent years, the agricultural focus in this section of Indiana has moved from cattle to grain crops that require the use of heavy farm equipment. The Miller-Purdue barn, though massive, was originally used to house livestock and has ceiling heights meant to accommodate cattle, not combines and tractors. Old barns like this one are increasingly viewed as obsolete, and many owners choose to dispose of them—either by burning or neglecting them—rather than adapt them for modern farming or other uses. Saving historic barns requires a concerted effort involving local, state, and federal officials, preservation groups, and, most important, farmers and owners. Since 1987, the National Trust's BARN AGAIN! program has shown thousands of farmers how historic barns can be adapted for new farming uses, and new legislation being developed could provide financial incentives for the barns' preservation.

Stevens Creek Settlements

LINCOLN, NE

Set in a gently rolling landscape just east of Lincoln, Nebraska, the fertile Stevens Creek valley has been considered prime agricultural land for more than a century. Many of its farms are still owned by descendants of the first settlers. The area attracted settlers at least a decade before Nebraska became a state in 1867. Building types and materials—ranging from stone and wood-frame farmhouses to log barns and precast concrete outbuildings—trace the history of architecture and farming practices over the past hundred and fifty years. Two sites—the Stevens Creek Stock Farm and the Herter-Sartore Farmstead—are already listed in the National Register



Stevens Creek Settlements

of Historic Places, and several others have been deemed eligible for listing.

The area now faces the threat of a proposed expressway and associated development that would bring noise, traffic, and sprawl. A comprehensive redevelopment plan for the Stevens Creek region pays inadequate attention to the need for protection of its historic farms. Even more ominous is the proposal to construct an expressway that would cut a large swath through the area. Planners need to allow for the protection of historic resources and should choose a route for the proposed highway that poses the least possible threat to the valley.



Count on Shell

Prairie Churches of North Dakota

STATEWIDE

Were it not for the prairie churches, the vast North Dakota landscape would stretch unbroken to the horizon. Founded by European and Scandinavian settlers, prairie churches were often the first buildings to be built when a town was settled. Since 1930, when North Dakota saw its population peak, many rural congregations have struggled to keep their churches going. Of North Dakota's two thousand church structures, more than four hundred are vacant, and many are threatened by inadequate maintenance and possible demolition. Many of these structures, including the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church in Wilton, contain irreplaceable artwork, stained-glass windows, carvings, and statues.



Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church

At the rate these churches are falling into disuse, fifty more may close this decade. But recent census data indicate that the population trend is changing: the state has grown for the first time in seventy years, and this may be good news for prairie churches. But even if prairie churches must close, they need not sit vacant or be demolished; they can be adapted for use as

community centers, libraries, and museums, or be used for family and community reunions, summer services, weddings, and baptisms.

Los Caminos del Rio

LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY, TX



Sanchez Vela

Stretching for two hundred miles between the cities of Laredo and Brownsville, Texas, the area known as "Los Caminos del Rio" encompasses farms, ranches, fast-growing cities, and dusty small towns whose history and architecture reflect a rich blend of Hispanic and Anglo cultures. The region is also a patchwork of newfound economic prosperity and longstanding poverty—a perplexing paradox that has thwarted efforts by Mexican and U.S.

agencies to preserve historic buildings and encourage heritage tourism. The many hardships faced by early Spanish settlers are reflected in the design of surviving fortified stone dwellings such as Sanchez Vela in San Ygnacio, Texas. Many communities still feature traditional town plans, often focusing on a central plaza and simple vernacular buildings.

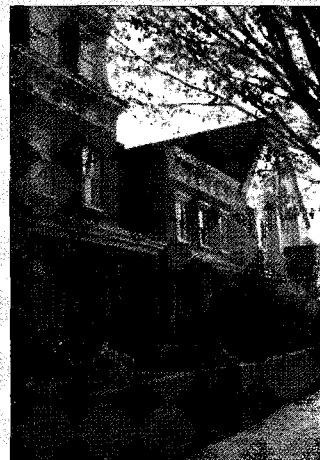
The area's older buildings and communities are threatened by poorly planned growth and inappropriate development, lack of funding, and simple neglect. In Rio Grande City, more than half of the town's historic properties are vacant and deteriorating; in Laredo, planned expansion of the border station could lead to widespread demolition in the historic Barrio Azteca neighborhood.

Public education, development of heritage tourism programs, identification of funding sources, and a strengthened public commitment to preservation are needed to save the region's unique heritage.

Historic Jackson Ward

RICHMOND, VA

Since the late nineteenth century, the Jackson Ward Historic District—known as the "Harlem of the South"—in Richmond, Virginia, has been one of America's largest African-American historic areas. Founded by free blacks and immigrants, Jackson Ward became a gerrymandered voting district in the 1870s. When early-twentieth-century Jim Crow laws took effect, the people of Jackson Ward created a self-sustaining economy that made the area famous as the "Black Wall Street" and alive with theaters, clubs, and restaurants. Jackson Ward boasts the first African-American bank in the country; the home of Maggie Walker, America's first female bank president; and Richmond's oldest public school building. A National Register inventory lists more than six hundred significant historic structures in the neighborhood.



Historic Jackson Ward

When desegregation came to Richmond, many residents moved away and many businesses dried up. Urban renewal in the 1970s and 1980s caused widespread demolition and insensitive development; since then, many of the neighborhood's remaining historic buildings have fallen into disrepair. A convention center built in the 1980s has recently expanded, and its 2003 reopening threatens to overwhelm Jackson Ward. While Jackson Ward has the tireless support of residents, preservationists, and city officials, it needs an informed master plan, sustained investment, and local protection measures.



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For more information about the National Trust and America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, or for information about becoming a Trust member, visit the National Trust's Web site, at www.nationaltrust.org, write to 1785 Massachusetts Avenue Northwest, Washington, D.C. 20036, or call 1-800-315-NTHP (6847).

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THE MAD POETS SOCIETY

McLean Hospital, in Massachusetts, was for years America's most literary mental institution, a place that Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, and Anne Sexton knew well

BY ALEX BEAM

.....

McLean Hospital, in suburban Boston, is not the nation's oldest mental hospital; that distinction belongs to the Pennsylvania Hospital, in Philadelphia. Nor is it generally considered the country's best; most professionals would probably rank the Menninger Clinic, in Topeka, Kansas, above McLean. But before the advent of diagnose-dose-and-discharge mental-health care, McLean, which sits on a gorgeous 240-acre campus in the town of Belmont, was probably the country's most aristocratic mental institution and definitely its most literary. Ralph Waldo Emerson complained in a letter about the high costs of

treatment for his brothers. In the late nineteenth century Henry Adams's sharp-tongued wife, Clover, remarked to her father that McLean "seems to be the goal of every good and conscientious Bostonian." Her brother, the treasurer of Harvard University, ended his life there. Reputable historians and even a former chief administrator of McLean insist that the father of American psychology, William James, was a patient there, although there is little evidence that this is true. Frederick Law Olmsted, who also died at McLean, chose the land for the campus.

In the modern era McLean became, if anything, more



literary and even fashionable. The curious “McLean chic,” which culminated in the unexpected success of the movie version of Susanna Kaysen’s memoir, *Girl, Interrupted*, can be traced to the fall of 1953, when McLean’s director, Franklin Wood, admitted a Smith College senior named Sylvia Plath, who was suffering from suicidal depression. Just six years after her treatment, when she was twenty-seven, Plath realized that she could capitalize on her stay at McLean. After spotting two articles on mental health in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, she wrote in her journal, “I *must* write one about a college girl suicide ... And a story, a novel even ... There is an increasing market for mental-hospital stuff. I am a fool if I don’t relive, recreate it.” When Plath’s novel, *The Bell Jar* (1971), finally appeared, it became must reading for girls, in the same way that J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* was devoured by moody adolescent boys. Wandering the fictional corridors of “Belsize” (Belknap) and “Wymark” (Wyman) Halls, thousands of American teenagers were getting a first-hand look inside McLean.

Plath was one of three major American poets who exploited their McLean experiences in their work. And although she was the first of the trio to check into McLean, she wasn’t the first to write about it. That distinction fell to Robert Lowell, who wrote an exquisite poem about a 1958 stay in McLean’s Bowditch Hall, “Waking in the Blue.” A copy of it was still pasted on the wall at the Bowditch nurses’ station in the late 1980s. Plath and her friend and rival Anne

Sexton attended Lowell’s poetry seminars at Boston University in 1959, and both quickly cottoned on to what Lowell was up to. Although well versed in classical poetry, Lowell was writing in a beautiful American vernacular, and he wrote about life as he found it, whether in an uncompromising portrait of his ineffectual father (“Father’s death was abrupt and unprotesting”) or in a heartrending description of returning to his wife and daughter after a few months in the “bin” (“I keep no rank nor station/Cured, I am frizzled, stale and small”). Plath had checked into McLean five years before Lowell, but it was Lowell who helped her to understand what madness had taught her. Sexton, too, experienced suicidal depression, and learned to write about it.

For all three poets sojourns at McLean provided not only needed respites but also creative material. Madness came out of the closet in their writings, and even acquired a certain cachet. Sexton’s biographer, Diane Middlebrook, caught the flavor when she wrote that McLean “had always held an odd glamour ... as the hospital of choice for the occasionally mad artists of Boston.”

The story of Plath’s stay at McLean has entered the literary canon not only by way of *The Bell Jar* but also from the writings of numerous biographers and memoirists. The consensus tale runs like this: A sensitive, erudite, and hardworking young woman from a conventional but not particularly happy family in Wellesley, Massachu-

MCCLEAN HOSPITAL ARCHIVES



McLean Hospital, Belmont, Massachusetts, 1910. Inset: During the late 1950s McLean’s nursing students and staff honed their skills at forms of recreational therapy.



Sylvia Plath, 1956

setts, Plath experienced mild depressions while studying at Smith. As well versed in Freud as any budding intellectual of her generation, she thought she had “penis envy” and suffered from “schizophrenia.” After winning a prestigious national contest and while working at *Mademoiselle* magazine, in New York, during June of 1953, she suffered a rare career setback: she was denied admission to a Harvard summer writing seminar. Trapped at home in August, drained of energy, she began to contemplate suicide. After a half-serious attempt to drown herself, Plath hid in a crawl space underneath her family’s house and swallowed an overdose of sleeping pills. She very nearly died. (“BEAUTIFUL SMITH GIRL MISSING AT WELLESLEY” and “TOP RANKING STUDENT AT SMITH MISSING FROM WELLESLEY HOME” were two of the front-page headlines in the Boston papers.) Her family and doctors concluded that her attempt went beyond the classic suicide “gesture” and packed her off to McLean.

Talented and ambitious, Plath had a knack for aligning herself with the best brains available. As at Smith, she was a “scholarship girl” at McLean, supported by the well-to-do novelist Olive Higgins Prouty, a forceful and intelligent woman who had suffered her own nervous breakdown a quarter century before. The psychiatrist with whom Plath met every day was Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, a real New York Tiffany and rare at McLean, where most of the doctors were men. Freudians would call it “transference”; whatever the case, Plath fell in love with her doctor. In *The Bell Jar* she

drew on her *Mademoiselle* training to describe “Dr. Nolan,” as she called Barnhouse in the book: “She wore a white blouse and a full skirt gathered at the waist by a wide leather belt, and stylish, crescent-shaped spectacles. This woman was a cross between Myrna Loy and my mother.” Years after her release from McLean, Plath continued to consult with Barnhouse, and in 1959 she confessed in her journal, “RB has become my mother.” When I interviewed Barnhouse, more than thirty years later (she has since died), it was easy to appreciate the spirit that had animated Plath. Taking a break from puffing on her Nat Sherman cigarettes during an outdoor interview on the cobbled Main Street in Nantucket, Barnhouse joined me for lunch at a restaurant called Arno’s that featured a “Healthy Beginnings” menu. “I just refuse on principle to order any food that has the word ‘health’ in its description,” she said. “The world began to go to hell in a basket when they substituted margarine for butter.”

Although Plath provided vivid descriptions of life at McLean in her letters, she rarely discussed her therapy. There wasn’t really a great deal to discuss. When Plath first arrived, Barnhouse decided to supplement psychotherapy with insulin-shock treatment, which not only failed to address the patient’s apathy but caused her face to bloat up and bruise, spoiling her natural beauty and compounding her crisis of self-doubt. Like most McLean patients, Plath was dosed with the anti-psychotic drug Thorazine, which contributed to her affectless behavior. Months after her arrival her therapy was still blocked. “I got her to draw things first, and then I had gotten her to talk, which was already something,” Barnhouse told me. “But she had been in there for months, and Mrs. Prouty was paying the bills. This was going on and on. She was totally depressed, and she wasn’t getting any better.”

Olive Prouty visited Plath regularly, and was becoming quite impatient with McLean. In November she wrote a letter to Franklin Wood, threatening to stop paying for treatment (Prouty thought it was nontreatment) that seemed to be leading nowhere. Prouty had spent time at Silver Hill, in Connecticut, a mental hospital with a more structured approach to mobilizing depressed patients, and she couldn’t abide the laissez-faire attitude at McLean. “I usually find Sylvia wandering listlessly up and down the corridor,” she complained to Wood, “and when I leave she says she will do the same, as there is nothing else for her to do.”

Plath’s stay was approaching its climax. Barnhouse decided to gamble, and proposed electroshock therapy. The idea was frightening—especially so to Plath, because she had suffered through several painful and impersonally administered shock treatments before coming to McLean. She had received no anesthesia before the treatments, and afterward she was wheeled into an empty recovery room to cope alone with her trauma. “She was not properly protected against the results of the treatments,” Prouty wrote to one of Plath’s doctors, “which were so poorly given that the patient remembers the details with horror.” Prouty was a meddler,

BETTMANN/CORBIS

but an informed meddler; and she voiced her opinion that the botched electroshock had driven Sylvia to attempt suicide. Barnhouse promised to stay with Plath during the therapy, and convinced her that this time the results would be different.

They were. In December, Plath received the first of three shock treatments. She regained her personality and composure so rapidly that she was able to spend Christmas at home. The hospital officially discharged her in late January, and by February she was back at Smith. Five years later Plath wrote of the treatments in her journal, "Why, after the 'amazingly short' three or so shock treatments did I rocket uphill? Why did I feel I needed to be punished, to punish myself?" Neither she nor Barnhouse could explain the miraculous turnabout. "I can't tell you what happened," Barnhouse said in Nanucket. "The human mind is very complex. That sounds obvious, but people keep forgetting it. They think you just throw a little Prozac in here, and a little of something else in here, it'll do this, this, and this. It's ridiculous."

Many psychiatric hospitals, including McLean, still administer a less traumatic form of shock treatment, more palatably christened "electroconvulsive therapy," to blocked patients. [See "Shock and Disbelief," by Daniel Smith, February *Atlantic*.] When it works, doctors are still at a loss to explain how.

By the time he first checked into McLean, in 1958, Robert Lowell was, as they say in the consumer-products field, a repeat user. Forty-one years old, a Pulitzer Prize winner and one of the country's most respected poets, Lowell experienced uncontrollable manic surges, and had been institutionalized before. To the astonishment of those around him, he would swell up with power, anger, and delusion. He would shower his closest friends with bitter, mocking curses, or proclaim undying love to an airline stewardess and insist on leaving the plane with her to start a new life. He once delivered a gibbering lecture lauding Adolf Hitler. Some stereotypes are true: there are people in mental institutions who want to assume the power of Napoleon, or of Jesus Christ, and at times Robert Lowell was one of them.

Just on the strength of his magnificent "Waking in the Blue," with its haunting description of life among the "Mayflower screwballs," Lowell was the uncrowned poet laureate of McLean.

... (This is the house for the "mentally ill.")

What use is my sense of humor?
I grin at Stanley, now sunk in his sixties,
once a Harvard all-American fullback,
(if such were possible!)
still hoarding the build of a boy in his twenties,
as he soaks, a ramrod
with the muscle of a seal
in his long tub,

vaguely urinous from the Victorian plumbing.
A kingly granite profile in a crimson golf-cap,
worn all day, all night,
he thinks only of his figure,
of slimming on sherbet and ginger ale—
more cut off from words than a seal.

This is the way day breaks in Bowditch Hall at McLean's;
the hooded night lights bring out "Bobbie,"
Porcellian '29,
a replica of Louis XVI
without the wig—
redolent and roly-poly as a sperm whale,
as he swashbuckles about in his birthday suit
and horses at chairs.

These victorious figures of bravado ossified young.

"Waking" was included in the book *Life Studies* (1959), which many Lowell admirers believe to be his best book. *Life Studies* is intensely autobiographical, and unsparing of Lowell's immediate and extended family. Sarah Payne Stuart, one of the poet's cousins, has recently suggested that the family's hostility to the poems may have precipitated a breakdown that sent Lowell back to McLean. After reading a pre-publication copy of the book, Lowell's formidable aunt Sarah Cotting announced, "I've just read what Bobby wrote about [his parents] Charlotte and Bob, and it's just awful." From her Beacon Hill town house she marched down to Lowell's home, on nearby Marlborough Street, and gave her nephew a piece of her mind. (This was the same aunt who once mused, while sitting on her yacht, "Why doesn't Bobby write about the sea? It's so pretty.") "I'm sorry you didn't like it," Lowell answered softly. "I thought it was rather good." A few weeks later *Life Studies* was formally published, and Lowell was back at McLean.

Because he was born into the Boston aristocracy, Lowell understood instinctively who was in McLean and why. He had grown up with "thoroughbred mental cases." No nuance of Boston snobbery could escape him—certainly not that he hailed from the line of thin-blooded, artistic Lowells, as opposed to the broad-shouldered, industrial-titan Lowells, who enriched themselves with textile mills along the Charles and Merrimack Rivers. Ralph Lowell, the downtown-banker chairman of McLean's board of trustees, was a "real" Lowell; Robert and his family, although they lived quite comfortably, were comparatively poor relations. Robert's father, Robert Traill Spence Lowell III, was a middle-ranking naval officer who had made a good match. His wife's family, the Winslows, proudly traced their ancestry back to the *Mayflower*. The venerable names attached to halls at McLean—Wyman, Appleton, Higginson, Bowditch—were the names of family friends. Robert had attended St. Mark's School and Harvard with the likes of them. Lowell read the hospital like an open book. In this case the book was a crazy salad of John Marquand, the Harvard faculty directory, and

the Social Register. He wrote to his friend the poet Elizabeth Bishop,

I live in an interesting house now at McLean's, one in which no man had entered since perhaps 1860; suddenly it was made co-ed. It was like entering some ancient deceased sultan's seraglio. We were treated to a maze of tender fussy attentions suitable for very old ladies: chocolate scented milk at 8:30; a lounging and snoozing bed spread after meals, each announcement of an appointment gently repeated at ten minute intervals, an old crone waiting on table barking like television turned on full to pierce through deafness. On the other hand, it took three days to get a shaving glass. The man next to me is a Harvard Law professor. One day, he is all happiness, giving the plots of Trollope novels, distinguishing delicately between the philosophies of Holmes and Brandeis, reminiscing wittily about Frankfurter. But on another day, his depression blankets him. Early in the morning, I hear cooing pigeon sounds, and if I listen carefully, the words: "Oh terror. TERROR!" Our other male assembles microscopically exact models of clippers and three masted schooners.

Both men, and I too, shrink before a garrulous Mrs. Churchill, sometimes related to the statesman and sometimes to the novelist ... "How are you related to Thomas Arnold Lowell?" I assumed she meant James Russell Lowell, and was abysmally wrong and have never been to explain. Pointing to the classical moulding on a mantelpiece, she will say, "That's Cameron Forbes, the ambassador to Japan," or begin a dinner conversation with, "Speaking of Rhode Island reds ..."

Sometimes with a big paper napkin stuck like an escaping bra on her throat, she will dance a little jig and talk about being presented to Queen Victoria. She was.

Lowell visited McLean four times over the course of eight years. He left a paper trail of letters with the return address 115 Mill Street, Belmont, Massachusetts. He is probably the only patient to have exchanged letters with Jackie Kennedy from the wards; she thanked him for a book he had sent her, and congratulated him on getting away for the holidays. Lowell also corresponded with the poet Theodore Roethke, who had his own struggles with mental illness (Lowell: "I feel great kinship with you"), and he mailed a letter from Bowditch to Ezra Pound, who had been locked up in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, in Washington, D.C. "Do you think a man who has been off his rocker as often as I have been could run for elective office and win?" Lowell inquired of Pound.

I have in mind the State senatorship from my district—the South End, Back Bay Boston, and your son's Roxbury etc. The incumbent is an inconspicuous Republican. His rival is a standard losing party democrat. I'd run as a democrat, and if I could edge out in the very difficult primaries, then I'd cream the Republican. And



Robert Lowell, 1961

then there'd be vistas before me as I sat in the Boston State Capitol on my little \$5,000 a year job that would cost me about \$10,000. What's your advice.

There is no trace of a reply.

Anne Sexton for years had a curious ambition: she wanted to be admitted to McLean. "If only I could get a scholarship to McLean," Sexton confided to her longtime friend and amanuensis Lois Ames, as if she were talking about a fellowship to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Sexton certainly had the qualifications: two suicide attempts by the age of thirty, and extended stays at the Glenside and Westwood Lodge sanatoriums. She wrote about her mania in her first poetry collection, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960). She reveled theatrically in her madness, and was not above using her shocking mood swings to manipulate her friends and family. But her therapist, Martin Orne, wary of the cost of extended stays at McLean, refused to commit her there. By age forty Sexton had won the Pulitzer Prize and had been written about in national magazines. But she had never had her ticket punched at McLean.

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Why McLean? Because of Plath and Lowell. "We both recognized that Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell had been there, and she wanted to be in that lineage," Ames told me some time ago, "the same way she wanted to be buried in Mount Auburn cemetery, where her family was buried." Sexton was ferociously competitive with Plath in all respects. Both had been reared in Boston's well-to-do western suburbs. Both were extremely articulate, beautiful, and sexually alert. Both had committed themselves to big poetry—publishing in the big magazines (*The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*) and with the big publishing houses (Knopf and Houghton Mifflin), and aiming at the big awards (the Pulitzer Prize, the Yale Younger Poets Award). Each knew she was unstable and vaguely understood that psychological torment somehow produced good poetry. Each saw herself, correctly, as a future suicide. Meeting in drunken martini klatches at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel after Lowell's poetry seminars, the two even discussed killing themselves. (Sexton on Plath: "She told the story of her first suicide in sweet and loving detail.") The conversation was not hypothetical. When talking about suicide, Plath and Sexton were interested in not if or when but how. After Plath ended her life, in 1963, Sexton published an essay-poem griping that Plath had trumped her in their mortal combat: "Thief! / how did you crawl into, / crawl down alone / into the death I wanted so badly and for so long."

The experiences of Lowell, a mentor of sorts, also weighed heavily in Sexton's thinking. As a student in his class, she couldn't help noticing when Lowell disappeared to McLean in the spring of 1959. His mania had overwhelmed him. One of Sexton's first recognized poems describes the ungainly Lowell, "like a hunk of some big frog," leaving his crowded poetry seminar to commit himself: "I must admire your skill," Sexton wrote. "You are so gracefully insane."

In 1968 Sexton received an invitation from Margaret Ball, McLean's librarian, to teach a poetry seminar at the hospital.

Dear Mrs. Sexton,

During the past two months, I have been directing quite a small group of McLean patients who write. Some are quite talented; some of the poems, especially, are fascinating.

I have heard you had, at one time, an interest in the writings of psychiatric patients; the patient who told me this is a great admirer of yours and suggested I invite you to address the group. I would like to amplify her suggestion to include a possible series of workshop or lecture meetings which you would lead ...

Ball was right: Sexton did have an interest in the writings of psychiatric patients. In fact, she believed that she had discovered her vocation as a poet because of her psychotic breakdowns. According to Diane Middlebrook, Sexton

created her own Genesis myth after her first nervous breakdown, as a writer "born again" from the slough of despond. "I found I belonged to the poets," Sexton said, and with Orne's support, she started writing poetry. Just as Sexton would later offer unbounded encouragement to her students at McLean, Orne responded generously. "He said [my poems] were wonderful," Sexton recalled. "I kept writing and writing and giving them all to him ... I kept writing because he was approving." Middlebrook concluded, "Poetry had saved her life."

Uncertain of her own abilities—she had never taught before—and wary of lecturing to a roomful of emotionally disturbed men and women, Sexton persuaded Ames, an experienced social worker, to accompany her to McLean. The seminar assembled every Tuesday evening in the hospital library. Typically, Sexton would assign the students a few poems written by contemporaries such as Diane Wakoski, Frederick Seidel, Robert Bagg, and Alike Barnstone. The tenor would range from the highly agitated to the desultory, depending on the combination of student-patients present. Sexton would ask each participant to prepare one or more poems for the following session, which Margaret Ball would collect during the week and send to Sexton at her home.

There was no way of knowing from week to week which patients might show up for the seminar. Although some patients were permitted to meander around the hospital grounds or even to take public transportation into town, others emerged from maximum-security wards with aides, dubbed "angels," who held them gently by the wrists, meaning that the patients were on suicide watch. Some patients' conditions varied from day to day, not to mention hour to hour. A patient who wrote an excellent poem might disappear for several weeks until his or her condition improved.

Robert Perkins, an author and documentary filmmaker now living in Cambridge, described the seminar in his 1996 memoir, *Talking to Angels*.

While I was [at McLean] Anne Sexton taught a poetry-writing class. She would come ... to meet with a small group of aspiring poets. It was as boring a two hours as any other, although some of the students were entertaining. These wackos would rise to their feet and make up their poems right there, often yelling them out loud. A chorus of nutcakes. Occasionally, Anne Sexton would speak, but more often she sat there with the rest of us and let events swirl around her. If people wanted to argue about poetry or spout poems, that was fine with her. Most of us, and I was one, could barely raise our heads, let alone write poetry or find anything intelligent to say.

Eleanor Morris, a young patient who had dropped out of Bryn Mawr several years earlier, preserved a different memory of the sessions with Sexton.

I have a mental image of Anne leaning on something in the library, maybe a piano, and the rest of us sitting around in chairs. She assigned us exercises, and you had to read your own poetry, which took a lot of courage. What I remember most is the blue, blue eyes. Her eyes were a piece of hope for me to see every week, they were daring me to do something.

There was no shortage of breeding or brainpower in the Sexton seminars. Perkins sprang from one of Boston's venerable first families; he had interrupted his studies at Harvard for a year to acquire his "McLean diploma." Morris was collaterally related to Ralph Waldo Emerson and Frederick Law Olmsted. But Sexton's favorite student proved to be a woman from Fort Smith, Arkansas, Eugenia Plunkett, who had suffered a nervous breakdown after her first year at Radcliffe College.

Plunkett, an attractive and precocious high school poet, had been a patient at McLean on and off for five years when she met Sexton. The move from Arkansas to Radcliffe and the Cambridge of the 1950s was too much for her. "She wasn't prepared for the transformation to Harvard," says her younger brother Robert, a businessman in Fort Smith. "Her grades had been straight *As* beforehand, but the competition was pretty tough. She wanted to have more of a social life, but she didn't know how to proceed."

It may have been Plunkett who suggested that Ball invite Sexton to teach at McLean. Although she made much of being shy, she sent Sexton some of her poems before the seminar began, and emphasized that she was a big fan. In one note she told Sexton, "I feel like your stringbean girl," a reference to the famous poem "Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman," which Sexton wrote for the eleventh birthday of her elder daughter, Linda.

The two women corresponded between classes. Sexton gossiped about the other patients in the seminar and enjoyed sharing confidences with her acolyte. When Plunkett announced that she had left her psychiatrist because he had divorced his wife, remarried, and refused to embark on an affair with her, Sexton—no stranger to the temptations of the therapist's couch—reacted knowingly.

He could have handled it better. Of course you felt rejected, but it seems too bad that you had to stop seeing him. One thing I'll say. All the psychiatrists I've seen have been crazy and yet I learn from them. From your description of him you certainly wouldn't want to be married to him, but I know the feeling better than you think.

When Plunkett published poems in literary magazines during the seminar, Sexton offered heartfelt congratulations on her success. One of Plunkett's most harrowing, and successful, poems appeared in the *Hudson Review*. Titled "Encounter, Psychiatric Institute," it took place at McLean.

That awful
Anonymity.
She smiled at me
From her pinned-down, stretched-out position flat
On the tilted stretcher two big men
Were hustling down the stairs. "And whom have I
To thank for care of me?" she seemed to say.
She smiled at me. Dark red and bright red were
The colors of her arm. Suddenly I knew
She'd done that shredding.

Dire, innocuous smile!

That anonymity? All people, strange
(Sudden, yet by an awful, slow degree
I knew), could never get a small word in
On her dark room, her razor, finger, arm,
Or her blind soul presiding. "Hear ye!" she
Said to the dark room of the world, alone.
And later even, outside, like galaxies
Of rocks—the stars—or animals—the dogs—
All we could ever do was stand and stare.
And there, the arm, bare. Like her own soul, bare.

She smiles at me across the ribbons—flesh—
That say, "I am alone—without a sound
You talk, without a recognition see
The star, the animal, the blood of me."

In 1969 Plunkett returned to Arkansas, where she remained in communication with Sexton. In June she reported that she had again been institutionalized: "No sweat, though, be out soon, I think." That was the summer of the moon landing, and Plunkett sent Sexton a poem about the event. Sexton responded, "I was pleased that you sent the poem to me although I didn't understand it . . . Your rhyming is very skillful, but I do hear you, Jeanie, I do hear you sing."

That year Plunkett published her only book of poetry, *If You Listen Quietly*, which included the poem "Fragment to Anne." Sixteen years later, after an adulthood beset with psychological and physical disorders, she died of a neurological seizure in Fort Smith, at the age of fifty-three.

In the spring of 1969 conflicting commitments started pulling Sexton away from the McLean seminar. She taught her last class in June. She corresponded with some of the patients for a few years after the class.

Perhaps inevitably, the intensely self-critical and depressive Sexton viewed the seminar as a failure. In December of 1973 she gathered some of the McLean poems and notes into a manila folder and scrawled in felt-tipped pen on the outside cover, "My first teaching of creative writing—1969 Very difficult due to my insufficient knowledge of handling groups and the fact that the group was constantly changing and the aides were easily mixed up with the poets—Decided more commitment on the part of the poet is needed for me to be able to teach well."



Anne Sexton, 1974

Whatever her misgivings about the McLean seminars, Sexton did gain from them the confidence to press forward with teaching. One of the McLean students organized a winter workshop for his Boston-area Oberlin classmates at Sexton's house. Then Sexton was given a faculty appointment at Boston University, where her poetry seminars acquired the same mythic cachet accorded Lowell's classes.

The McLean students seemed to love Sexton, for her celebrity, for her own struggles with mental illness, and for the effort she invested in the course. Margaret Ball, who sent Sexton periodic updates on the patients' lives between class meetings, informed her that her works were stolen from the library more often than any other author's: "All My Pretty Ones" (replacement volume 4) lasted 1 week on the shelf before stolen."

Robert Perkins, who remembers Sexton as "very pretty and very nervous," wrote, "I've since come to appreciate how difficult it must have been for Anne Sexton to come back to the hospital and deal with a group of loonies. She had been there herself. Maybe she felt she could help one of us. Maybe she did."

Near the end of her life Sexton realized her grim ambition. In psychic despair, she was admitted to McLean in 1973 for five days of psychiatric examination. The Patients' Property Form is one of the few documents remaining from this visit. It reveals that on August 2 Sexton surrendered nine

credit cards (one from the Hotel Algonquin) and \$220 in cash and traveler's checks (five dollars in dimes, presumably for parking meters). She reclaimed her effects on August 7.

Sexton's former student Eleanor Morris met her teacher unexpectedly that week in the North Belknap medium-security hall. "She remembered me from the seminar, but we didn't talk much," Morris recalls. "She looked so awful ... my heart went out to her." Here was the terrible leveling of mental illness: Sexton, the elegant, chain-smoking Pulitzer Prize winner cast adrift among her former student-patients. Sexton was just a year away from suicide, firmly embarked on *The Awful Rowing Toward God*, her last collection of poems.

Morris still remembers being awakened by her clock radio on Saturday, October 5, 1974. A newsreader announced that the poet Anne Sexton had died. "It just said she had died, but I knew she had committed suicide, and I spent the whole morning crying," Morris says.

Morris still has a book of poems that Sexton gave her after one of the seminars, a 1966 collection called *Live or Die*. Inside Sexton wrote, "My directive is LIVE—to Ellie."

Eleanor Morris is living and writing poetry in Concord, Massachusetts. ■

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A READER'S MANIFESTO

*An attack on the growing pretentiousness
of American literary prose*

BY B. R. MYERS

Illustrations by Steven Guarnaccia

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Nothing gives me the feeling of having been born several decades too late quite like the modern “literary” best seller. Give me a time-tested masterpiece or what critics patronizingly call a fun read—*Sister Carrie* or just plain *Carrie*. Give me anything, in fact, as long as it doesn’t have a recent prize jury’s seal of approval on the front and a clutch of precious raves on the back. In the bookstore I’ll sometimes sample what all the fuss is about, but one glance at the affected prose—“furious dabs of tulips stuttering,” say, or “in the dark before the day yet was”—and I’m hightailing it to the friendly black spines of the Penguin Classics.

I realize that such a declaration must sound perversely ungrateful to the literary establishment. For years now editors, critics, and prize jurors, not to mention novelists themselves, have been telling the rest of us how lucky we are to be alive and reading in these exciting times. The absence of a dominant school of criticism, we are told, has given rise to an extraordinary variety of styles, a smorgasbord with something for every palate. As the novelist and critic David Lodge has remarked, in summing up a lecture about the co-existence of fabulation, minimalism, and other movements, “Everything is in and nothing is out.” Coming from insiders to whom a term like “fabulation” actually means something, this hyperbole is excusable, even endearing; it’s as if a team of hotel chefs were getting excited about their assortment of cabbages. From a reader’s standpoint, however, “variety” is the last word that comes to mind, and more appears to be “out” than ever before. More than half a century ago popular storytellers like Christopher Isherwood and Somerset Maugham were ranked among the finest novelists of their time, and were considered no less literary, in their own way, than Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Today any accessible, fast-moving story written in unaffected prose is deemed to be “genre fiction”—at best an excellent “read” or a “page turner,” but never literature with a capital L. An author with a track record of blockbusters may find the publication of a

new work treated like a pop-culture event, but most “genre” novels are lucky to get an inch in the back pages of *The New York Times Book Review*.

Everything written in self-conscious, writerly prose, on the other hand, is now considered to be “literary fiction”—not necessarily *good* literary fiction, mind you, but always worthier of respectful attention than even the best-written thriller or romance. It is these works that receive full-page critiques, often one in the Sunday book-review section and another in the same newspaper during the week. It is these works, and these works only, that make the annual short lists of award committees. The “literary” writer need not be an intellectual one. Jeering at status-conscious consumers, bandying about words like “ontological” and “nominalism,” chanting *Red River* hokum as if it were from a lost book of the Old Testament: this is what passes for profundity in novels these days. Even the most obvious triteness is acceptable, provided it comes with a postmodern wink. What is not tolerated is a strong element of action—unless, of course, the idiom is obtrusive enough to keep suspense to a minimum. Conversely, a natural prose style can be pardoned if a novel’s pace is slow enough, as was the case with Ha Jin’s aptly titled *Waiting*, which won the National Book Award (1999) and the PEN/Faulkner Award (2000).

The dualism of literary versus genre has all but routed the old trinity of highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow, which was always invoked tongue-in-cheek anyway. Writers who would once have been called middlebrow are now assigned, depending solely on their degree of verbal affectation, to either the literary or the genre camp. David Guterson is thus granted Serious Writer status for having buried a murder mystery under sonorous tautologies (*Snow Falling on Cedars*, 1994), while Stephen King, whose *Bag of Bones* (1998) is a more intellectual but less pretentious novel, is still considered to be just a very talented genre storyteller.

Everything is “in,” in other words, as long as it keeps the reader at a respectfully admiring distance. This may seem

an odd trend when one considers that the reading skills of American college students, who go on to form the main audience for contemporary Serious Fiction, have declined markedly since the 1970s. Shouldn't a dumbed-down America be more willing to confer literary status on straightforward prose, instead of encouraging affectation and obscurity?

Not necessarily. In Aldous Huxley's *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) a character named Mr. Cardan makes a point that may explain today's state of affairs.

Really simple, primitive people like their poetry to be as ... artificial and remote from the language of everyday affairs as possible. We reproach the eighteenth century with its artificiality. But the fact is that *Beowulf* is couched in a diction fifty times more complicated and unnatural than that of [Pope's poem] *Essay on Man*.

Mr. Cardan comes off in the novel as a bit of a windbag, but there is at least anecdotal evidence to back up his observation. We know, for example, that European peasants were far from pleased when their clergy stopped mystifying them with Latin. Edward Pococke (1604–1691) was an English preacher and linguist whose sermons, according to the *Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes*, “were always composed in a plain style upon practical subjects, carefully avoiding all show and ostentation of learning.”

But from this very exemplary caution not to amuse his hearers (contrary to the common method then in vogue) with what they could not understand, some of them took occasion to entertain very contemptible thoughts of his learning ... So that one of his Oxford friends, as he traveled through Childrey, inquiring for his diversion of some of the people, Who was their minister, and how they liked him? received this answer: “Our parson is one Mr. Pococke, a plain honest man. But Master,” said they, “he is no Latiner.”

Don't get me wrong—I'm not comparing anyone to a peasant. But neither am I prepared to believe that the decline of American literacy has affected everyone but fans of Serious Fiction. When reviewers and prize jurors tout a repetitive style as “the last word in gnomic control,” or a jumble of unsustained metaphor as “lyrical” writing, it is obvious that they, too, are having difficulty understanding what they read. Would Mr. Cardan be puzzled to find them in the thrall of writers who are deliberately obscure, or who chant in strange cadences? I doubt it. And what could be more natural than that the same elite should scorn unaffected English as “workmanlike prose”—an idiom incompatible with real literature? Stephen King's a plain, honest man, just the author to read on the subway. But Master, he is no Latiner.

If the new dispensation were to revive good “Mandarin” writing—to use the term coined by the British critic Cyril Connolly for the prose of writers like Virginia Woolf and

James Joyce—then I would be the last to complain. But what we are getting today is a remarkably crude form of affectation: a prose so repetitive, so elementary in its syntax, and so numbing in its overuse of wordplay that it often demands less concentration than the average “genre” novel. Even today's obscurity is easy—the sort of gibberish that stops all thought dead in its tracks. The best way to demonstrate this in the space at hand is to take a look at some of the most highly acclaimed styles of contemporary writing.

“EVOCATIVE” PROSE

It has become fashionable, especially among female novelists, to exploit the license of poetry while claiming exemption from poetry's rigorous standards of precision and polish. Edna O'Brien is one of the writers who do this, but Annie Proulx is better known, thanks in large part to her best seller *The Shipping News* (1993). In 1999 Proulx wrapped up the acknowledgments in a short-story anthology titled *Close Range* by thanking her children, in characteristic prose, “for putting up with my strangled, work-driven ways.”

That's right: “strangled, work-driven ways.” *Work-driven* is fine, of course, except for its note of self-approval, but *strangled ways* makes no sense on any level. Besides, how can anything, no matter how abstract, be strangled and work-driven at the same time? Maybe the author was referring to something along the lines of a nightly smackdown with the Muse, but only she knows for sure. Luckily for Proulx, many readers today expect literary language to be so remote from normal speech as to be routinely incomprehensible. “*Strangled ways*,” they murmur to themselves in baffled admiration. “Now who but a Writer would think of that!”

The short stories in *Close Range* are full of this kind of writing. “The Half-Skinned Steer” (which first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, in November of 1997), starts with this sentence:

In the long unfurling of his life, from tight-wound kid hustler in a wool suit riding the train out of Cheyenne to geriatric limper in this spooled-out year, Mero had kicked down thoughts of the place where he began, a so-called ranch on strange ground at the south hinge of the Big Horns.

Like so much modern prose, this demands to be read quickly, with just enough attention to register the bold use of words. Slow down, and things fall apart. Proulx seems to have intended a unified conceit, but *unfurling*, or spreading out, as of a flag or an umbrella, clashes disastrously with the images of thread that follow. (Maybe “unraveling” didn't sound fancy enough.) A life is *unfurled*, a hustler is *wound tight*, a year is *spooled out*, and still the metaphors continue, with *kicked down*—which might work in less crowded surroundings, though I doubt it—and *hinge*, which is cute if you've never seen a hinge or a map of the Big Horns. And this is just the first sentence!

Proulx once acknowledged that she tends to “compress” too much into short stories, but her wordplay is just as relentless in her novels; she seems unaware that all innovative language derives its impact from the contrast to straightforward English. It is common to find her devoting more than one metaphor or simile to the same image. “Furious dabs of tulips stuttering in gardens.” “An apron of sound lapped out of each dive.” “The ice mass leaned as though to admire its reflection in the waves, leaned until the southern tower was at the angle of a pencil in a writing hand, the northern tower reared over it like a lover.” “The children rushed at Quoyle, gripped him as a falling man clutches the window ledge, as a stream of electric particles arcs a gap and completes a circuit.” In one brief paragraph in *The Shipping News* a man’s body is likened to a loaf of bread, his flesh to a casement, his head to a melon, his facial features to fingertips, his eyes to the color of plastic, and his chin to a shelf.

This isn’t all bad, of course; the bit about the ice mass admiring its reflection is effective. And every so often Proulx lets a really good image stand alone: “The dining room, crowded with men, was lit by red bulbs that gave them a look of being roasted alive in their chairs.” Such hits are so rare, however, that after a while the reader stops trying to think about what the metaphors mean. Maybe this is the effect that Proulx is aiming for; she seems to want to keep us on the surface of the text at all times, as if she were afraid that we might forget her quirky narratorial presence for even a line or two.

The decline of American prose since the 1950s is nowhere more apparent than in the decline of the long sentence. Today anything longer than two or three lines is likely to be a simple list of attributes or images. Proulx relies heavily on such sentences, which often call to mind a bad photographer hurrying through a slide show. In this scene from *Accordion Crimes* (1996) a woman has just had her arms sliced off by a piece of sheet metal.

She stood there, amazed, rooted, seeing the grain of the wood of the barn clapboards, paint jawed away by sleet and driven sand, the unconcerned swallows darting and reappearing with insects clasped in their beaks looking like mustaches, the wind-ripped sky, the blank windows of the house, the old glass casting blue swirled reflections at her, the fountains of blood leaping from her stumped arms, even, in the first moment, hearing the wet thuds of her forearms against the barn and the bright sound of the metal striking.

The last thing Proulx wants is for you to start wondering whether someone with blood spurting from severed arms is going to stand *rooted* long enough to see more than one bird disappear, catch an insect, and reappear, or whether the whole scene is not in bad taste of the juvenile variety. Instead you are meant to read the sentence in one

mental breath and succumb, under the sheer accumulation of words, to a spurious impression of what Walter Kendrick, in an otherwise mixed review in *The New York Times*, called “brilliant prose” (and in reference to this very excerpt, besides).

Another example:

Partridge black, small, a restless traveler across the slope of life, an all-night talker; Mercalia, second wife of Partridge and the color of a brown feather on dark water, a hot intelligence; Quoyle large, white, stumbling along, going nowhere.

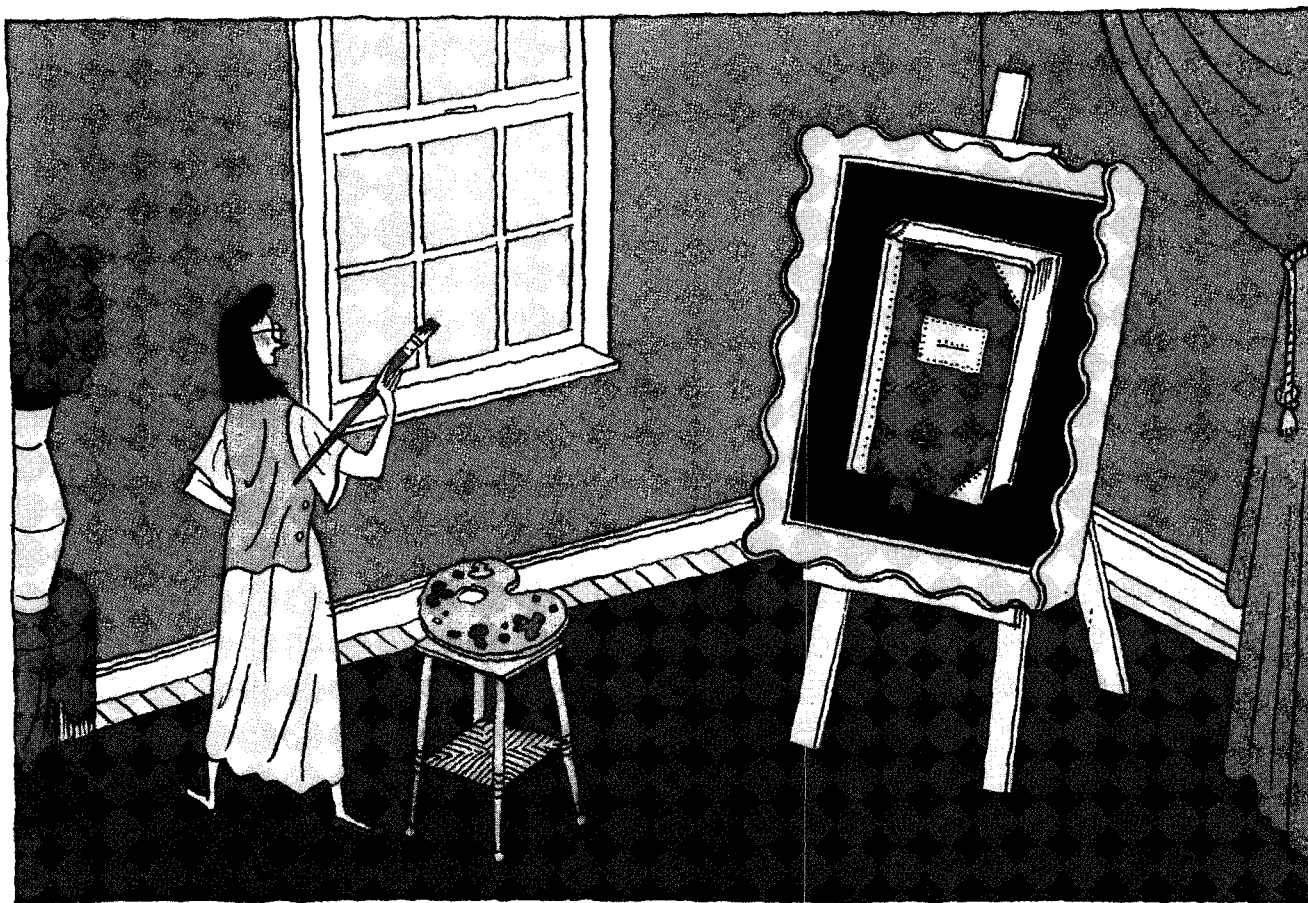
Black, small, large, white: these are lazy, inexpressive adjectives. For all its faux precision, that feather simile is ultimately meaningless: there are too many possible browns for it to evoke whatever shade Proulx had in mind (even with *dark water* involved). A more concise syntax would show up the poverty of this description at once, but by stringing a dozen attributes together she ensures that each is seen only in the context of a dazzlingly “pyrotechnic” whole.

Since Proulx is a novelist and not a poet, her need to draw attention to her presence throughout the text poses certain challenges. How can she keep the focus on her style even during the nuts-and-bolts work of exposition? How can she get to the next purple passage as fast as possible without resorting to straightforwardness, that dreaded idiom of the genre hack? Her solution: an obtrusive—and therefore “literary”—telegraphese: “Made a show of taking Quoyle back as a special favor. Temporary ... Fired, car wash attendant, rehired. Fired, cabdriver, rehired.” Not even Proulx’s fans will go so far as to praise this aspect of her writing, but they probably share her impatience to cut to the “lyrical” chase.

Many of Proulx’s characters are described almost exclusively in terms of regional or ethnic origin. From *Accordion Crimes*:

[Chris] wore a pair of dark glasses and began to run with a bunch of *cholos*, especially with a rough called “*Venas*,” a black mole on his left nostril, someone who poured money into his white Buick with the crushed velvet upholstery, whose father, Paco Robelo, the whole Robelo family, were rumored to be connected with *narcotraficantes*.

Venas is one of many characters to be introduced in a flurry of words and then dropped from the narrative. We hear no more of this Latin stereotype until several years and pages later, when the author, as if realizing she didn’t need him in the first place, notes in an offhand sentence that he was found clubbed to death. We are not meant to care who did it or why, or how the death affects Chris. So why did we need to know the exact location of the man’s mole, or his father’s first name? If the lapping aprons are fake Dylan Thomas, an effort to mystify readers into thinking they are



reading poetry, then this is fake Dos Passos, easy detail flung in for the illusion of panoramic sweep. Alas, Proulx is only cheating herself. By putting everything in sharp focus she lessens the impact of her vivid sense of locale. Some of the personal details, too, especially in *The Shipping News*, are so brilliant that they cry out for more breathing room—such as the information, which is somehow both funny and sad at the same time, that a man’s cheap wet socks have dyed his toenails blue.

Of course, one can hardly blame Proulx for thinking, “If it ain’t broke, why fix it?” Her novel *Postcards* (1992) received the PEN/Faulkner Award; *The Shipping News* won both the National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize. Her writing, like that of so many other novelists today, is touted as “evocative” and “compelling.” The reason these vague attributes have become *the* literary catchwords of our time, even more popular than “raw” and “angry” were in the 1950s, is that they allow critics to praise a writer’s prose without considering its effect on the reader. It is easier to call writing like Proulx’s lyrically evocative or poetically compelling than to figure out what it evokes, or what it compels the reader to think and feel. How can *Close Range* really impart a sense of life in Wyoming when everything—from the loneliness of the plains to the grisly violence it actuates—is described in the same razzle-dazzle style, the same jumpy rhythms? And why should we care about char-

acters whose gruesome deaths and injuries are treated only as a pretext for more wordplay?

The critics’ admiration for Proulx reflects a growing consensus that the best prose is that which yields the greatest number of standout sentences, regardless of whether or not they fit the context. (In *The New York Times* the critic Richard Eder quoted with approval a flashy excerpt from *Close Range* about a car trip that the characters themselves do not appear to find remarkable at all.) Proulx’s sentences are often praised for having a life of their own: they “dance and coil, slither and pounce” (K. Francis Tanabe, *The Washington Post*), “every single sentence surprises and delights and just bowls you over” (Carolyn See, *The Washington Post*), a Proulx sentence “whistles and snaps” (Dan Cryer, *Newsday*). In 1999 Tanabe kicked off the *Post*’s online discussion of Proulx’s work by asking participants to join him in “choosing your favorite sentence(s) from any of the stories in *Close Range*.” I doubt that any reviewer in our more literate past would have expected people to have favorite sentences from a work of prose fiction. A favorite character or scene, sure; a favorite line of dialogue, maybe; but not a favorite sentence. We have to read a great book more than once to realize how consistently good the prose is, because the first time around, and often even the second, we’re too involved in the story to notice. If Proulx’s fiction is so compelling, why are its fans more impressed by individual sentences than by the whole?

"MUSCULAR" PROSE

The masculine counterpart to the ladies' prose poetry is a bold, Melvillean stiltedness, better known to readers of book reviews as "muscular" prose. Charles Frazier, Frederick Busch, and many other novelists write in this idiom, but the acknowledged granddaddy of them all is Cormac McCarthy. In fairness, it must be said that McCarthy's style was once very different. *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), his debut novel, is a masterpiece of careful and restrained writing. An excerpt from the first page:

Far down the blazing strip of concrete a small shapeless mass had emerged and was struggling toward him. It loomed steadily, weaving and grotesque like something seen through bad glass, gained briefly the form and solidity of a pickup truck, whipped past and receded into the same liquid shape by which it came.

There's not a word too many in there, and although the tone is hardly conversational, the reader is addressed as the writer's equal, in a natural cadence and vocabulary. Note also how the figurative language (*like something seen through bad glass*) is fresh and vivid without seeming to strain for originality.

Now read this from McCarthy's *The Crossing* (1994), part of the acclaimed Border Trilogy: "He ate the last of the eggs and wiped the plate with the tortilla and ate the tortilla and drank the last of the coffee and wiped his mouth and looked up and thanked her."

Thriller writers know enough to save this kind of syntax for fast-moving scenes: "... and his shout of fear came as a bloody gurgle and he died, and Wolff felt nothing" (Ken Follett, *The Key to Rebecca*, 1980). In McCarthy's sentence the unpunctuated flow of words bears no relation to the slow, methodical nature of what is being described. And why repeat *tortilla*? When Hemingway wrote "small birds blew in the wind and the wind turned their feathers" ("In Another Country," 1927), he was, as David Lodge points out in *The Art of Fiction* (1992), creating two sharp images in the simplest way he could. The repetition of *wind*, in subtly different senses, heightens the immediacy of the referent while echoing other reminders of Milan's windiness in the fall. McCarthy's second *tortilla*, in contrast, is there, like the syntax, to draw attention to the writer himself. For all the sentence tells us, it might as well be this: "He ate the last of the eggs. He wiped the plate with the tortilla and ate it. He drank the last of the coffee and wiped his mouth. He looked up and thanked her." Had McCarthy written *that*, the critics would have taken him to task for his "workmanlike" prose. But the first version is no more informative or pleasing to the ear than the second, which can at least be read aloud in a natural fashion. (McCarthy is famously averse to public readings.) All the original does is say, "I express myself differently from you, therefore I am a Writer."

The same message is conveyed by the stern biblical tone that runs through all of McCarthy's recent novels. Parallelisms and pseudo-archaic formulations abound: "They caught up and set out each day in the dark before the day yet was and they ate cold meat and biscuit and made no fire"; "and they would always be so and never be otherwise"; "the captain wrote on nor did he look up"; "there rode no soul save he," and so forth.

The reader is meant to be carried along on the stream of language. In the *New York Times* review of *The Crossing*, Robert Hass praised the effect: "It is a matter of straight-on writing, a veering accumulation of compound sentences, stinginess with commas, and a witching repetition of words ... Once this style is established, firm, faintly hypnotic, the crispness and sinuousness of the sentences ... gather to a magic." The key word here is "accumulation." Like Proulx and so many others today, McCarthy relies more on bar-rages of hit-and-miss verbiage than on careful use of just the right words.

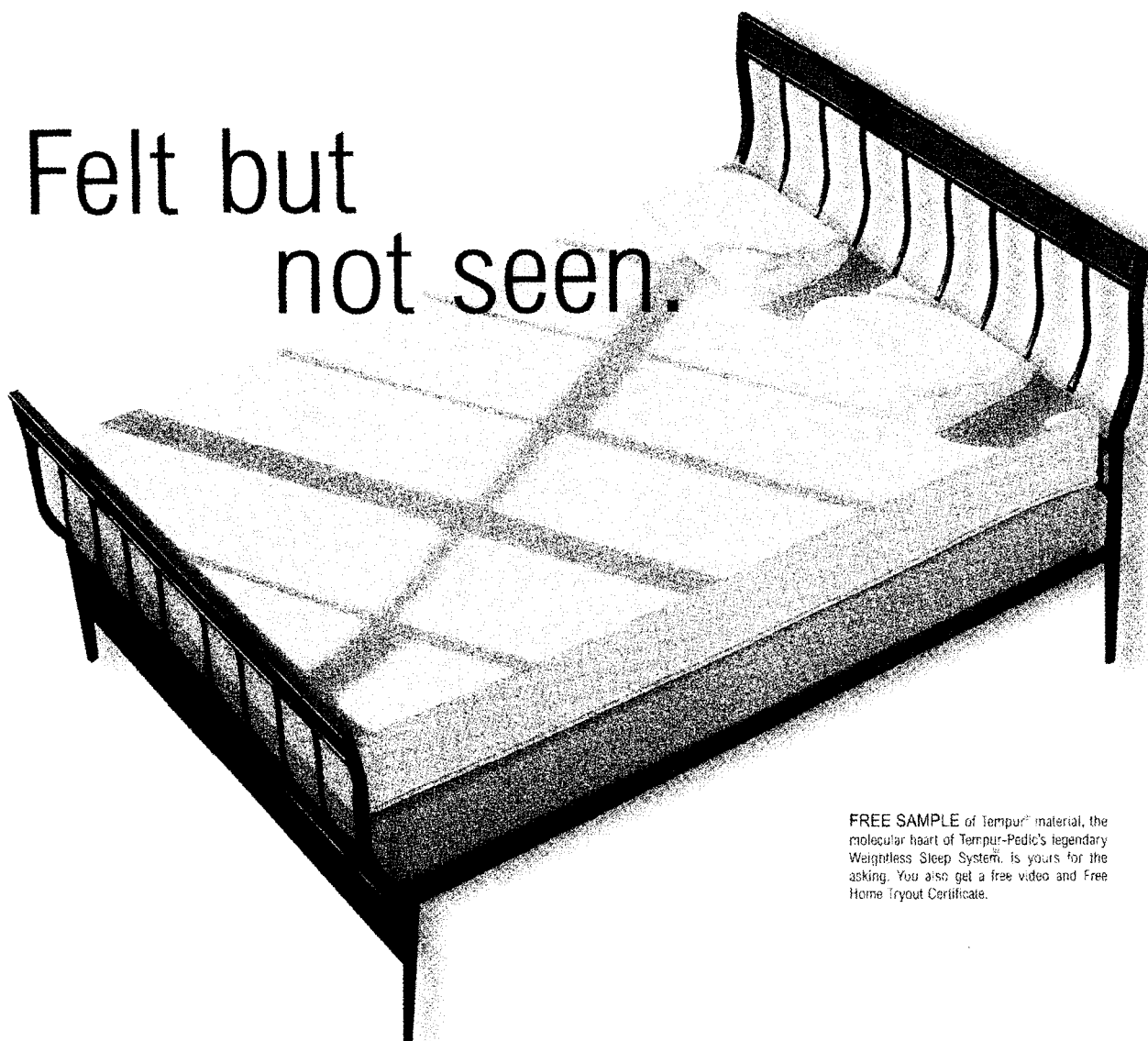
While inside the vaulting of the ribs between his knees the darkly meaty heart pumped of who's will and the blood pulsed and the bowels shifted in their massive blue convolutions of who's will and the stout thigh-bones and knee and cannon and the tendons like flaxen hawsers that drew and flexed and drew and flexed at their articulations of who's will all sheathed and muffled in the flesh and the hooves that stove wells in the morning groundmist and the head turning side to side and the great slaverling keyboard of his teeth and the hot globes of his eyes where the world burned. (*All the Pretty Horses*, 1992)

This may get Hass's darkly meaty heart pumping, but it's really just bad poetry formatted to exploit the lenient standards of modern prose. The obscurity of *who's will*, which has an unfortunate Dr. Seussian ring to it, is meant to bully readers into thinking that the author's mind operates on a plane higher than their own—a plane where it isn't ridiculous to eulogize the shifts in a horse's bowels.

As a fan of movie westerns, I refuse to quibble with the myth that a wild landscape can bestow epic significance on the lives of its inhabitants. But novels tolerate epic language only in moderation. To record with the same somber majesty every aspect of a cowboy's life, from a knife fight to his lunchtime burrito, is to create what can only be described as kitsch. Here we learn that out west even a hangover is something special.

[They] walked off in separate directions through the chaparral to stand spraddlelegged clutching their knees and vomiting. The browsing horses jerked their heads up. It was no sound they'd ever heard before. In the gray twilight those retchings seemed to echo like the calls of some rude provisional species loosed upon that waste. Something imperfect and malformed lodged in the heart

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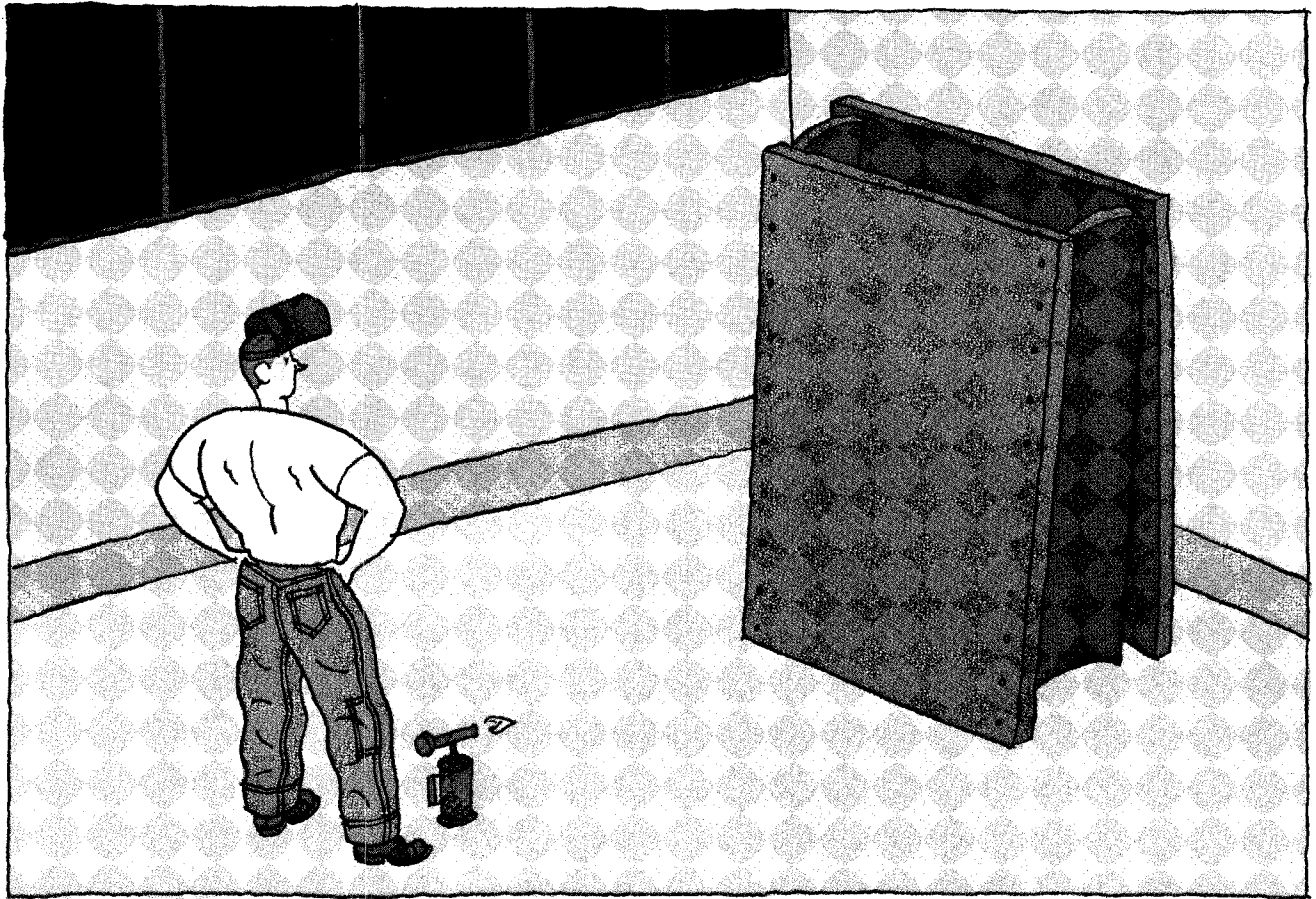
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of being. A thing smirking deep in the eyes of grace itself like a gorgon in an autumn pool. (*All the Pretty Horses*)

It is a rare passage that can make you look up, wherever you may be, and wonder if you are being subjected to a diabolically thorough *Candid Camera* prank. I can *just* go along with the idea that horses might mistake human retching for the call of wild animals. But “wild animals” isn’t epic enough: McCarthy must blow smoke about *some rude provisional species*, as if your average quadruped had impeccable table manners and a pension plan. Then he switches from the horses’ perspective to the narrator’s, though just what *something imperfect and malformed* refers to is unclear. The last half sentence only deepens the confusion. Is the *thing smirking deep in the eyes of grace* the same thing that is *lodged in the heart of being*? And what is a *gorgon* doing in a *pool*? Or is it peering into it? And why an *autumn* pool? I doubt if McCarthy can explain any of this; he probably just likes the way it sounds.

No novelist with a sense of the ridiculous would write such nonsense. Although his characters sometimes rib one another, McCarthy is among the most humorless writers in American history. In this excerpt the subject is horses.

He said that the souls of horses mirror the souls of men more closely than men suppose and that horses also love war. Men say they only learn this but he said that no creature can learn that which his heart has no shape

to hold ... Lastly he said that he had seen the souls of horses and that it was a terrible thing to see. He said that it could be seen under certain circumstances attending the death of a horse because the horse shares a common soul and its separate life only forms it out of all horses and makes it mortal ... Finally John Grady asked him if it were not true that should all horses vanish from the face of the earth the soul of the horse would not also perish for there would be nothing out of which to replenish it but the old man only said that it was pointless to speak of there being no horses in the world for God would not permit such a thing. (*All the Pretty Horses*)

The further we get from our cowboy past, the loonier becomes the hippophilia we attribute to it. More to the point, especially considering *The New York Times*’s praise of *All the Pretty Horses* for its “realistic dialogue,” is the stiltedness with which the conversation is reproduced. The cowboys are supposed to be talking to a Mexican in Spanish, which is a stretch to begin with, but from the tone in which the conversation is set down you’d think it was ancient Hebrew. And shouldn’t Grady satisfy our curiosity by finding out what a horse’s soul looks like, instead of pursuing a hypothetical point of equine theology? You half expect him to ask how many horses’ souls can fit on the head of a pin.

All the Pretty Horses received the National Book Award in

1992. “Not until now,” the judges wrote in their fatuous citation, “has the unhuman world been given its own holy canon.” What a difference a pseudo-biblical style makes; this so-called canon has little more to offer than the conventional belief that horses, like dogs, serve us well enough to merit exemption from an otherwise sweeping disregard for animal life. (No one ever sees a cow’s soul.) McCarthy’s fiction may be less fun than the “genre” western, but its world view is much the same. So is the cast of characters: the quiet cowboys, the women who “like to see a man eat,” the howling savages. (In fairness to the western: McCarthy’s depiction of Native Americans in *Blood Meridian* [1985] is far more offensive than anything in Louis L’Amour.) The critics, however, are too much impressed by the muscles of his prose to care about the heart underneath. Even *The Village Voice* has called McCarthy “a master stylist, perhaps without equal in American letters.” Robert Hass wrote much of his review of *The Crossing* in an earnest imitation of McCarthy’s style:

The boys travel through this world, tipping their hats, saying “yessir” and “nosir” and “si” and “es verdad” and “claro” to all its potential malice, its half-mad philosophers, as the world washes over and around them, and the brothers themselves come to be as much arrested by the gesture of the quest as the old are by their stores of bitter wisdom and the other travelers, in the middle of life, in various stages of the arc between innocence and experience, by whatever impulses have placed them on the road.

The vagueness of that encomium must annoy McCarthy, who prides himself on the way he tackles “issues of life and death” head on. In interviews he presents himself as a man’s man with no time for pansified intellectuals—a literary version, if you will, of Dave Thomas, the smugly parochial old-timer in the Wendy’s commercials. It would be both unfair and a little too charitable to suggest that this is just a pose. When McCarthy says of Marcel Proust and Henry James, “I don’t understand them. To me, that’s not literature,” I have a sinking feeling he’s telling the truth.

“EDGY” PROSE

Not all contemporary writing is marked by the Proulx-McCarthy brand of obscurity. Many novels intimidate readers by making them wonder not what the writer is saying but *why* he is saying it. Here, for example, is the opener to Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985).

The station wagons arrived at noon, a long shining line that coursed through the west campus. In single file they eased around the orange I-beam sculpture and moved toward the dormitories. The roofs of the station wagons were loaded down with carefully secured suitcases full of light and heavy clothing; with boxes of blankets, boots and shoes, stationery and books, sheets, pillows, quilts; with rolled-up rugs and sleeping bags, with bicycles, skis, rucksacks, English and Western

saddles, inflated rafts. As cars slowed to a crawl and stopped, students sprang out and raced to the rear doors to begin removing the objects inside; the stereo sets, radios, personal computers; small refrigerators and table ranges; the cartons of phonograph records and cassettes; the hairdryers and styling irons; the tennis rackets, soccer balls, hockey and lacrosse sticks, bows and arrows; the controlled substances, the birth control pills and devices; the junk food still in shopping bags—onion-and-garlic chips, nacho thins, peanut creme patties, Waffelos and Kabooms, fruit chews and toffee popcorn; the Dum-Dum pops, the Mystic mints.

This is the sort of writing, full of brand names and wardrobe inventories, that critics like to praise as an “edgy” take on the insanity of modern American life. It’s hard to see what is so edgy about describing suburbia as a wasteland of stupefied shoppers, which is something left-leaning social critics have been doing since the 1950s. Still, this is foolproof subject matter for a novelist of limited gifts. If you find the above shopping list fascinating, then DeLillo’s your man. If you complain that it’s just dull, and that you got the message about a quarter of the way through, he can always counter by saying, “Hey, I don’t *make* the all-inclusive, consumption-mad society. I just report on it.”

Of course the narrator, a professor called Jack Gladney, can’t actually see what’s inside the students’ bags; he’s just trying to be funny. So is there really a caravan of station wagons, or is that also a joke? How much of the above passage, for that matter, are we even supposed to bother visualizing? Similar questions nag at the reader throughout *White Noise*. We are no sooner introduced to Jack and his wife than their conversation marks them as paper-flat contrivances.

“It’s the day of the station wagons.” ...

“It’s not the station wagons I wanted to see. What are the people like? Do the women wear plaid skirts, cable-knit sweaters? Are the men in hacking jackets? What’s a hacking jacket?”

No real person would utter those last two questions in sequence. DeLillo’s characters talk and act like the aliens in *3rd Rock From the Sun*, which would be fine if we weren’t supposed to accept them as dead-on satires of the way we live now. The American supermarket is presented as a haven of womblike contentment, a place where people go to satisfy deep emotional needs. (In a *New York Times* interview after the novel’s publication DeLillo elaborated on the theme by comparing supermarkets to churches.) This sort of patronizing nonsense is typical of Consumerland writers; someone should break the news to them that the average shopper feels nothing in a supermarket but the strong urge to get out again. *White Noise* also continues a long intellectual tradition of exaggerating the effects of advertising. Here Steffie, the narrator’s young daughter, talks in her sleep.

She uttered two clearly audible words, familiar and elusive at the same time, words that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant.

Toyota Celica.

A long moment passed before I realized this was the name of an automobile. The truth only amazed me more. The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform ... Whatever its source, the utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence.

DeLillo has said that he wants to impart a sense of the “magic and dread” lurking in our consumer culture, but what a poor job he does of this! There is so little apparent wonder in the girl’s words that only a metaphor drawn from recognizable human experience could induce us to share Jack’s excitement. Instead we are told of an unnamed name carved on a tablet in the sky, and in cuneiform to boot. The effect of all this is so uninvolved, so downright silly, that it baffles even sympathetic readers. It is left to real-life professors to explain the passage in light of what DeLillo has said in interviews and other novels about how people use words to assuage a fear of death. Cornel Bonca, of California State University, writes, “If we see Steffie’s outburst as an example of the death-fear speaking *through* consumer jargon, then Jack’s wondrous awe will strike us, strange as it may seem, as absolutely appropriate.” A good novelist, of course, would have written the scene more persuasively in the first place. Far stranger things happen in Nikolai Gogol’s *Dead Souls* (1842), but we don’t need an academic intermediary to argue their plausibility or to explain what Gogol was getting at.

In this excerpt from *White Noise*, Jack and his family go shopping.

In the mass and variety of our purchases, in the sheer plenitude those crowded bags suggested, the weight and size and number, the familiar package designs and vivid lettering, the giant sizes, the family bargain packs with Day-Glo sale stickers, in the sense of replenishment we felt, the sense of well-being, the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls—it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being that is not known to people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening.

Could the irony be any less subtle? And the tautology: *mass, plenitude, number, well-being, contentment!* The clumsy echoes: *size, sizes, familiar, family; sense of, sense of; well-being, being!* I wouldn’t put it past DeLillo’s apologists to claim that this repetition is meant to underscore the superfluity of goods in the supermarket. The fact remains that here, as in the *Toyota Celica* scene, the novel tries to convey the magical appeal of consumerism in prose that is simply flat and tiresome.

At least that paragraph is coherent. Most of the author’s thoughts, regardless of which character is speaking them, take the form of disjointed strings of elliptical statements. This must be what satisfies critics that they are in the presence of a challenging writer—but more often than not “the dry shrivelled kernel,” to borrow a line from Anne Brontë, “scarcely compensates for the trouble of cracking the nut.” Here, for example, Jack Gladney tells a woman why he gave his child the name Heinrich.

“I thought it was forceful and impressive ... There’s something about German names, the German language, German *things*. I don’t know what it is exactly. It’s just there. In the middle of it all is Hitler, of course.”

“He was on again last night.”

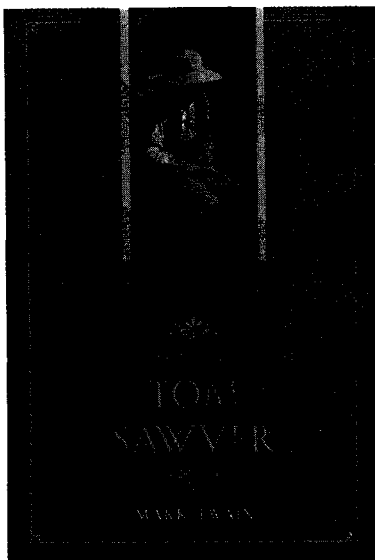
“He’s always on. We couldn’t have television without him.”

“They lost the war,” she said. “How great could they be?”

“A valid point. But it’s not a question of greatness. It’s not a question of good and evil. I don’t know what it is. Look at it this way. Some people always wear a favorite color. Some people carry a gun. Some people put on a uniform and feel bigger, stronger, safer. It’s in this area that my obsessions dwell.”

So Gladney thinks there is something forceful about German names. This is such a familiar idea that we naturally assume DeLillo is going to do more with it. Instead he gives us a frivolous non sequitur about television, followed by a clumsy rehashing of the first point. If the narrator’s obsessions dwell “in this area,” shouldn’t he be able to tell us something we don’t know, instead of “Some people put on a uniform and feel bigger, stronger, safer”?

Another source of spurious profundity is DeLillo’s constant allusions to momentous feelings and portents—allusions that are either left hanging in the air or are conveniently cut short by a narrative pretext. Jack ponders the clutter in his house: “Why do these possessions carry such sorrowful weight? There is a darkness attached to them, a foreboding. They make me wary not of personal failure and defeat but of something more general, something large in scope and content.” What is this *something large in scope and content*? We are never told. Later Jack registers “floating nuances of being” between him and his stepdaughter. Similar phrases turn up throughout DeLillo’s novels; they are perhaps the most consistent element of his style. In *Underworld* (1997) a man’s mouth fills with “the foretaste of massive inner shiftings”; another character senses “some essential streak of self”; the air has “the feel of some auspicious design”; and so on. This is the safe, catchall vagueness of astrologists and palm readers. DeLillo also adds rhetorical questions or other disclaimers to throw his meaning out of focus. Here, to return to *White Noise*, is another of Jack’s musings.



“The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who *can't* read them.”

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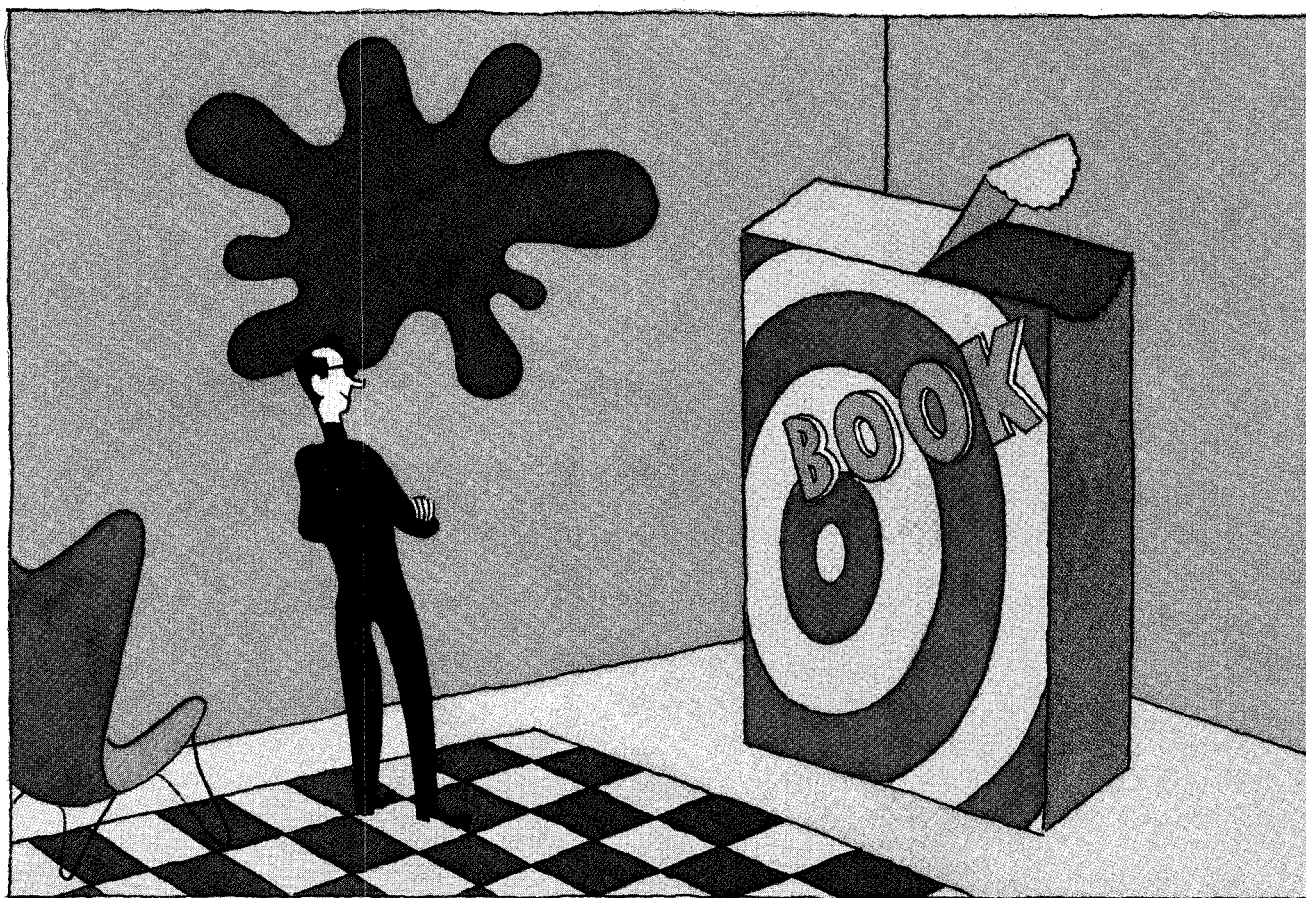
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"We edge nearer death every time we plot. It is like a contract that all must sign, the plotters as well as those who are the targets of the plot."

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The first and third of those questions are easily answered; after all, we edge nearer death every time we do anything. So why, indeed, does Jack say this? Because DeLillo knew it would seem profoundly original to most of his readers. Then he added those questions to keep the critical minority from charging him with banality.

Interspersed with these ruminations we get long conversations of the who's-on-first? variety. These only highlight the sameness of the characters' speech. Young and old, male and female, all sound alike.

"What do you want to do?" she said.

"Whatever you want to do."

"I want to do whatever's best for you."

"What's best for me is to please you," I said.

"I want to make you happy, Jack."

"I'm happy when I'm pleasing you."

"I just want to do what you want to do."

"I want to do whatever's best for you."

And so on. To anyone who calls that excruciating, DeLillo might well respond, "That's my whole point! This is communication in Consumerland!" It isn't unlikely, considering

how the dialogue loses its logic halfway through, that the whole thing was written only to be skimmed anyway. Like the bursts of brand names that occur throughout the text ("Tegrin, Denorex, Selsun Blue"), this is more evidence of DeLillo's belief—apparently shared by Mark Leyner, Brett Easton Ellis, and others—that writing trite and diffuse prose is a brilliant way to capture the trite and diffuse nature of modern life.

But why should we bother with Consumerland fiction at all, if the effect of reading it is the same queasy fatigue we can get from an evening of channel-surfing? Do we need writers like DeLillo for their insight, which rarely rises above the level of "some people put on a uniform and feel bigger"? Or do we need them for an ironic perspective that most of us acquired in childhood, when we first started sneering at commercials? Yes on both counts, according to the jurors of the National Book Award, who gave *White Noise* the nod in 1985. The novel's inflated reputation remains a clear signal that we should expect less from contemporary fiction than from books written in our grandparents' day. Just as it is now enough for a prose poet to be vaguely "evocative," it is enough for an intellectual writer to point our thoughts in a familiar direction. Jayne Anne Phillips praised *White Noise* in *The New York Times* in 1985 for choosing to "offer no answers" and instead posing "inescapable questions with consummate skill." She also said,

“[The narrator of *White Noise*] is one of the most ironic, intelligent, grimly funny voices yet to comment on life in present-day America. This is an America where no one is responsible or in control; all are receptors, receivers of stimuli, consumers.” In other words, this is an America that Andy Warhol began commenting on in the 1960s, and in far more coherent fashion. Warhol even *wrote* better, for God’s sake. But then, where would Notable New Fiction be without the willing suspension of cultural literacy?

Most of DeLillo’s admirers hedge their bets by praising his style—or, my favorite, his “analytic rigor” (Jay McInerney)—while offering only a phrase or two of textual evidence. Phillips at least had the guts to quote a lengthy excerpt from *White Noise* in which a character holds forth on the semiotics of—what else?—the supermarket.

“Everything is concealed in symbolism ... The large doors slide open, they close unbidden. Energy waves, incident radiation ... code words and ceremonial phrases. It is just a question of deciphering ... Not that we would want to ... This is not Tibet ... Tibetans try to see death for what it is. It is the end of attachment to things. This simple truth is hard to fathom. But once we stop denying death, we can proceed calmly to die ... We don’t have to cling to life artificially, or to death ... We simply walk toward the sliding doors ... Look how well-lighted everything is ... sealed off ... timeless. Another reason why I think of Tibet. Dying is an art in Tibet ... Chants, numerology, horoscopes, recitations. Here we don’t die, we shop. But the difference is less marked than you think.”

That couldn’t be rendered any less coherent if the sentences were mixed up in a hat and pulled out again at random. I hasten to add that Phillips made those ellipses herself, in a brave attempt to isolate a logical thought from the original mess. All the same, she presented the above as evidence of DeLillo’s “understanding and perception of America’s soundtrack.” This is the irony of Consumerland fiction: its fans are even more helpless in the presence of authoritative posturing, and even more terrified of saying “I don’t understand,” than the shoppers they feel so superior to.

Throughout DeLillo’s career critics have called his work funny: “absurdly comic ... laugh-out-loud funny” (Michiko Kakutani), “grimly funny” (Phillips). And most seem to agree with Christopher Lehmann-Haupt that *White Noise* is “one of Don DeLillo’s funniest.” At the same time, they refuse to furnish examples of what they find so amusing. I have a notion it’s things like “Are the men in hacking jackets? What’s a hacking jacket?” but it would be unfair to assert this without evidence. Luckily for our purposes, Mark Osteen, in an introduction to a recent edition of the novel, singles out the following conversation as one of the best bits of “sparkling dialogue” in this “very funny” book. It is telling that the same cultural elite that never quite “got” the British comic novel should split its sides at this.

“I will read,” she said. “But I don’t want you to choose anything that has men inside women, quote-quote, or men entering women. ‘I entered her.’ ‘He entered me.’ We’re not lobbies or elevators. ‘I wanted him inside me,’ as if he could crawl completely in, sign the register, sleep, eat, so forth. Can we agree on that? I don’t care what these people do as long as they don’t enter or get entered.”

“Agreed.”

“‘I entered her and began to thrust.’”

“I’m in total agreement,” I said.

“Enter me, enter me, yes, yes.”

“Silly usage, absolutely.”

“Insert yourself, Rex. I want you inside me, entering hard ...”

And so on. Osteen would probably have groaned at that exchange if it had turned up on *Sex and the City*. The fuss he makes over it in this context is a good example of how pathetically grateful readers can be when they discover—lo and behold!—that a “literary” author is actually trying to entertain them for a change.

“SPARE” PROSE

Anyone who doubts the declining literacy of book reviewers need only consider how the gabbiest of all prose styles is invariably praised as “lean,” “spare,” even “minimalist.” I am referring, of course, to the Paul Auster School of Writing.

It was dark in the room when he woke up. Quinn could not be sure how much time had passed—whether it was the night of that day or the night of the next. It was even possible, he thought, that it was not night at all. Perhaps it was merely dark inside the room, and outside, beyond the window, the sun was shining. For several moments he considered getting up and going to the window to see, but then he decided it did not matter. If it was not night now, he thought, then night would come later. That was certain, and whether he looked out the window or not, the answer would be the same. On the other hand, if it was in fact night here in New York, then surely the sun was shining somewhere else. In China, for example, it was no doubt mid-afternoon, and the rice farmers were mopping sweat from their brows. Night and day were no more than relative terms; they did not refer to an absolute condition. At any given moment it was always both. The only reason we did not know it was because we could not be in two places at the same time. (*City of Glass*, 1985)

This could be said in half as many words, but then we might feel even more inclined to ask why it needs to be said at all. (Who ever thought of night and day as *an absolute condition* anyway?) The flat, laborious wordiness signals that this is avant-garde stuff, to miss the point of which would put us on the level of the morons who booed *Le Sacre du*

Printemps. But what *is* the point? Is the passage meant to be banal, in order to trap philistines into complaining about it, thereby leaving the cognoscenti to relish the irony on some postmodern level? Or is there really some hidden significance to all this time-zone business? The point, as Auster's fans will tell you, is that there can be no clear answers to such questions; fiction like *City of Glass* urges us to embrace the intriguing ambiguities that fall outside the framework of the conventional novel. All interpretations of the above passage are allowed, even encouraged—except, of course, for the most obvious one: that Auster is simply wasting our time.

This is another example of what passes for thought in his fiction.

“Remember what happened to the father of our country. He chopped down the cherry tree, and then he said to his father, ‘I cannot tell a lie.’ Soon thereafter, he threw the coin across the river. These two stories are crucial events in American history. George Washington chopped down the tree and then he threw away the money. Do you understand? He was telling us an essential truth. Namely, that money doesn’t grow on trees.” (*City of Glass*)

It’s always risky to identify a novelist’s thoughts with his characters; but the prevalence of these free-associative parlor games in Auster’s fiction suggests that he finds them either amusing or profound. This is from *Moon Palace* (1989).

One thought kept giving way to another, spiraling into ever larger masses of connectedness. The idea of voyaging into the unknown, for example, and the parallels between Columbus and the astronauts. The discovery of America as a failure to reach China; Chinese food and my empty stomach; thought, as in food for thought, and the head as a palace of dreams. I would think: the Apollo Project; Apollo, the god of music ... It went on and on like that, and the more I opened myself to these secret correspondences, the closer I felt to understanding some fundamental truth about the world. I was going mad, perhaps, but I nevertheless felt a tremendous power surging through me, a gnostic joy that penetrated deep into the heart of things. Then, very suddenly, as suddenly as I had gained this power, I lost it.

That talk of *secret correspondences* and *gnostic joy* appears aimed at making trusting readers think there must be some insight here that they are too dim to grasp. For the rest of us the narrator includes a disclaimer: “I was going mad, perhaps.” Like DeLillo, Auster knows the prime rule of pseudo-intellectual writing: the harder it is to be pinned down on any idea, the easier it is to conceal that one has no ideas at all.

What gives Auster away is his weakness for facetious displays of erudition. In passages like the following it becomes so clear what Nabokovian effect he is trying for, and

so clear that he can’t pull it off, that the whole house of cards comes tumbling down.

When I met Kitty Wu, she called me by several other names ... Foggy, for example, which was used only on special occasions, and Cyrano, which developed for reasons that will become clear later. Had Uncle Victor lived to meet her, I’m sure he would have appreciated the fact that Marco, in his own small way, had at last set foot in China. (*Moon Palace*)

By falling in love with a Chinese woman, the narrator can perhaps be said to have “discovered” China, though God knows that’s awful enough, but *set foot* in it? It is no mean feat to be precious and clumsy at the same time. More examples:

[At school the name] Fogg lent itself to a host of spontaneous mutilations: Fag and Frog, for example, along with countless meteorological references: Snowball Head, Slush Man, Drizzle Mouth. (*Moon Palace*)

... a new tonality had crept into the bronchial music—something tight and flinty and percussive—... (*Timbuktu*, 1999)

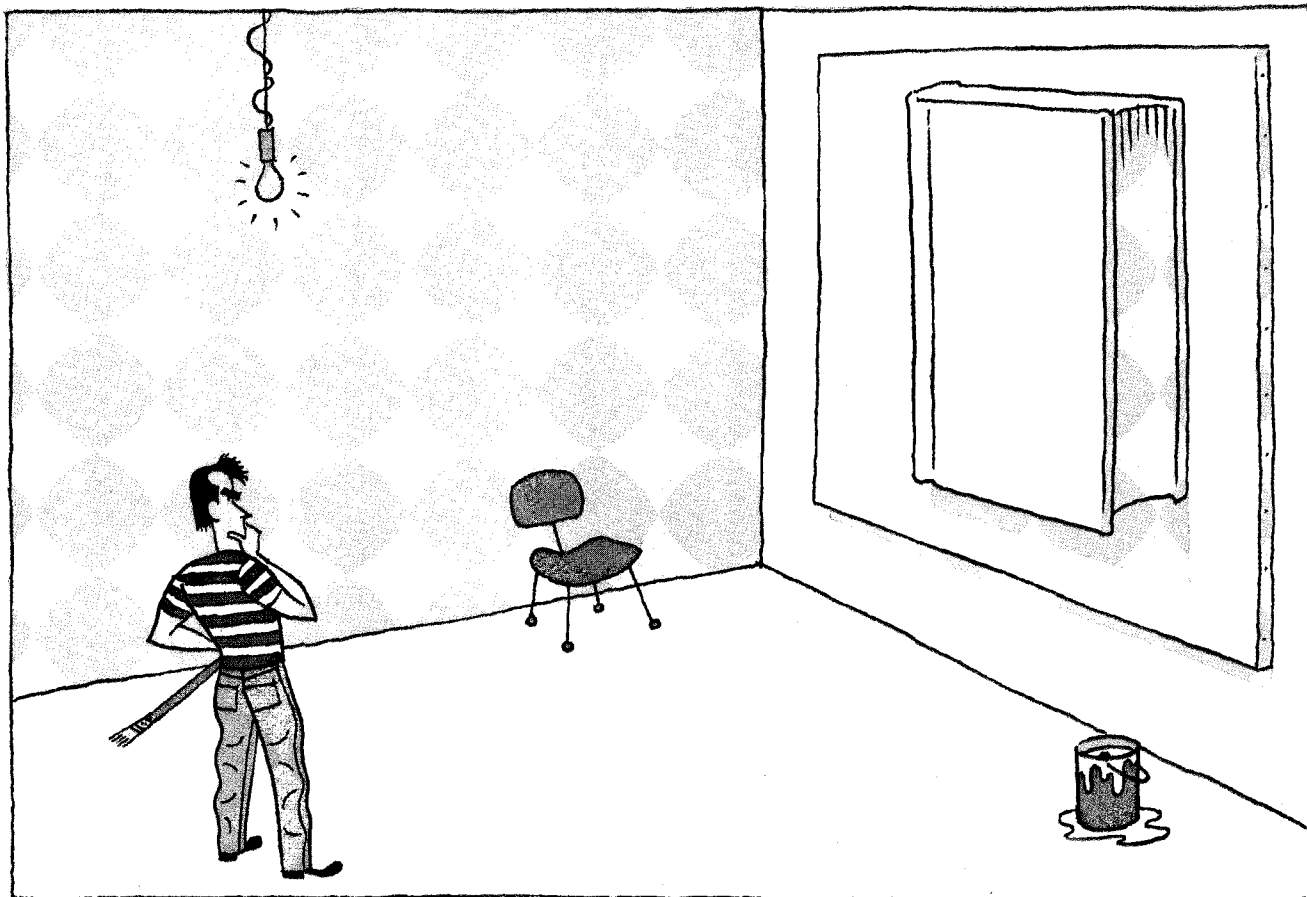
Was Mr. Bones an angel trapped in the flesh of a dog? Willy thought so ... How else to interpret the celestial pun that echoed in his mind night and day? To decode the message, all you had to do was hold it up to a mirror. Could anything be more obvious? Just turn around the letters of the word *dog*, and what did you have? The truth, that’s what. (*Timbuktu*)

Nobody’s perfect. But why should we forgive a writer for trying to pass off a schoolboy anagram as a *celestial pun*, or *snowball* as a meteorological reference, or *tonality* as a synonym for “tone,” when he himself is trying so hard to draw attention to his fancy-pants language? Even worse is the way he abuses philosophical terms.

According to him, [the name Marco Stanley Fogg] proved that travel was in my blood, that life would carry me to places where no man had ever been before. Marco, naturally enough, was for Marco Polo, the first European to visit China; Stanley was for the American journalist who had tracked down Dr. Livingstone “in the heart of darkest Africa”; and Fogg was for Phileas, the man who had stormed around the globe in less than three months ... In the short run, Victor’s nominalism helped me to survive the difficult first few weeks in my new school. (*Moon Palace*)

This is for people who know only that *nominalism* has something to do with names. In fact the nominalists argued that just because words exist for generalities like humanity doesn’t mean that these generalities exist. What does that have to do with Uncle Victor’s talk?

Another hallmark of Auster’s style, and of contemporary



American prose in general, is tautology. Swing the hammer often enough, and you're bound to hit the nail on the head—or so the logic seems to run.

His body burst into dozens of small pieces, and fragments of his corpse were found ... (*Leviathan*, 1992)

Blue can only surmise what the case is not. To say what it is, however, is completely beyond him. (*Ghosts*, 1986)

My father was tight; my mother was extravagant. She spent; he didn't. (*Hand to Mouth*, 1997)

Inexpressible desires, intangible needs, and unarticulated longings all passed through the money box and came out as real things, palpable objects you could hold in your hand. (*Hand to Mouth*)

Still and all, Mr. Bones was a dog. From the tip of his tail to the end of his snout, he was a pure example of *Canis familiaris*, and whatever divine presence he might have harbored within his skin, he was first and foremost the thing he appeared to be. Mr. Bow Wow, Monsieur Woof Woof, Sir Cur. (*Timbuktu*)

This sort of thing is everywhere, and yet the relative shortness of Auster's sentences has always fooled critics into thinking that he never wastes a word. His style has been praised as "brisk, precise" (*The New York Times*) and "straightforward, almost invisible" (*The Village Voice*). Dennis

Drabelle, in *The Washington Post*, called it "always economical—clipped, precise, the last word in gnomic control," which looks like something Auster wrote himself.

The creator of Monsieur Woof Woof has also received the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. (Why he still hasn't received the National Book Award I cannot imagine.) Critics compare him to Kafka, but it is from Borges that Auster borrows his allegories (detective work, biographical research) and his favorite theme: the impossibility of ever really *knowing* anything. This is an unwise choice of material, because he is not enough of a thinker to convey the fun that makes intellectual exercise worthwhile after all. The gnostic correspondences between *Chinese food* and *food for thought*; *dog* spelled backwards is *god*—this is philosophical writing?

Then again, Auster is commercially successful precisely because he offers so much cachet in return for so little concentration. Whole chapters can be skimmed with impunity. He creates a dog that understands English perfectly, only to describe how it likes to sniff excrement. He christens his hero Marco Stanley Fogg, a name portending lots of onomastic exposition and tales of playground cruelty, and then spends pages giving us just that. A man counts his books (why?) and finds that there are precisely 1,492 of them, and his nephew is going to a certain university in New York

City. "A propitious number, I think, since it evokes ..." Go on. Take a wild guess.

GENERIC "LITERARY" PROSE

A thriller must thrill or it is worthless; this is as true now as it ever was. Today's "literary" novel, on the other hand, need only evince a few quotable passages to be guaranteed at least a lukewarm review. This reflects both the growing influence of the sentence cult and a desire to reward novelists for aiming high. It is perhaps natural, therefore, that the "literary" camp now attracts a type of risk-averse writer who, under different circumstances, might never have strayed from the safest thriller or romance formulae. Many critically acclaimed novels today are no more than mediocre "genre" stories told in a conformist amalgam of approved "literary" styles. Every amalgam is a little different, of course; what unites these writers and separates them from the rest of the "literary" camp is the determinedly slow tempo of their prose. They seem to know that in leaner and livelier form their courtroom dramas, geisha memoirs, and horse-whisperer romances would not be taken seriously, and that it is precisely the lack of genre-ish suspense that elevates them to the status of prize-worthy "tales of loss and redemption."

The most successful of these writers is David Guterson, who was recently named by the tony journal *Granta* as one of America's twenty best young novelists. This is from *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1994), which won the PEN/Faulkner and spent more than a year on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

He didn't like very many people anymore or very many things, either. He preferred not to be this way, but there it was, he was like that. His cynicism—a veteran's cynicism—was a thing that disturbed him all the time ... It was not even a thing you could explain to anybody, why it was that everything was folly. People appeared enormously foolish to him. He understood that they were only animated cavities full of jelly and strings and liquids. He had seen the insides of jaggedly ripped-open dead people. He knew, for instance, what brains looked like spilling out of somebody's head. In the context of this, much of what went on in normal life seemed wholly and disturbingly ridiculous ... He sensed [people's] need to extend sympathy to him, and this irritated him even more. The arm was a grim enough thing without that, and he felt sure it was entirely disgusting. He could repel people if he chose by wearing to class a short-sleeved shirt that revealed the scar tissue on his stump. He never did this, however. He didn't exactly want to *repel* people. Anyway, he had this view of things—that most human activity was utter folly, his own included, and that his existence in the world made others nervous. He could not help but possess this unhappy perspective, no matter how much he might not want it. It was his and he suffered from it numbly.

I apologize for the length of that excerpt, but it takes more than a few sentences to demonstrate the repetitive sluggishness of Guterson's prose. Michael Crichton could have given us the same stock character of the Alienated Veteran in one of those thumbnail descriptions he's always getting slammed for, but Guterson seems intent on dragging everything out.

The word *thing* is used to add bulk. "You could not explain to anybody why everything was folly" becomes *It was not even a thing you could explain to anybody, why it was that everything was folly*. "His cynicism disturbed him" becomes *His cynicism ... was a thing that disturbed him*. "He believed that" becomes *he had this view of things—that*. There is plenty of unnecessary emphasis, the classic sign of a writer who lacks confidence: "*enormously* foolish," "*wholly* ... ridiculous," "*entirely* disgusting." There are sentences that seem to serve no purpose at all: "He could repel people if he chose by wearing to class a short-sleeved shirt that revealed the scar tissue on his stump. He never did this, however. He didn't exactly want to *repel* people. Anyway ..." Almost every thought is echoed: "He preferred not to be this way, but there it was, he was like that ... He could not help but possess this unhappy perspective, no matter how much he might not want it." And "... everything was folly. People appeared enormously foolish to him ... In the context of this, much of what went on in normal life seemed wholly and disturbingly ridiculous ... Anyway, he had this view of things—that most human activity was utter folly ..." You could study that passage all day and find no trace of a flair for words. Many readers, however, including the folks at *Granta*, are willing to buy into the scam that anything this dull must be Serious and therefore Fine and therefore Beautiful Writing.

Like Cormac McCarthy, to whom he is occasionally compared, Guterson thinks it more important to sound literary than to make sense. This is the oft-quoted opening to *East of the Mountains* (1999).

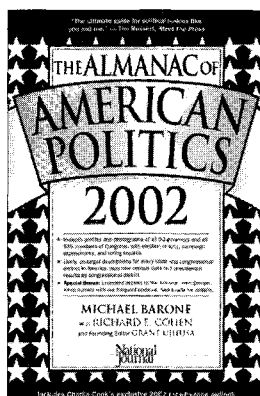
On the night he had appointed his last among the living, Dr. Ben Givens did not dream, for his sleep was restless and visited by phantoms who guarded the portal to the world of dreams by speaking relentlessly of this world. They spoke of his wife—now dead—and of his daughter, of silent canyons where he had hunted birds, of august peaks he had once ascended, of apples newly plucked from trees, and of vineyards in the foothills of the Apennines. They spoke of rows of campanino apples near Monte Della Torracchia; they spoke of cherry trees on river slopes and of pear blossoms in May sunlight.

Now, if the doctor's sleep was *visited by phantoms* (*visited*, mind you, not "interrupted"), then surely he was dreaming after all? Or were the phantoms keeping him awake? But isn't *restless sleep* still sleep? The answer, of course, is that it doesn't matter one way or the other: Guterson is just swing-

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"The 1st runs north on both sides of the Broad Street corridor to include much of black North Philadelphia and south through most of heavily Italian South Philadelphia, where Italian families and their grocery stores and restaurants have been pressed tightly into narrow English and Indian-named streets under a tangle of overhead wires; this is the neighborhood where the various Rockys were filmed and the original Philadelphia cheesesteaks are sold."

—*The Almanac of American Politics on Pennsylvania's 1st Congressional District*



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ing a pocket watch in front of our eyes. "You're in professional hands," he's saying, "for only a Serious Writer would express himself so sonorously. Now read on, and remember, the mood's the thing."

What follows is a Proulx-style succession of images. By the end of the third sentence, with its *cherry trees*, *pear blossoms*, and still more *apples*, the accumulation of pedestrian phrases is supposed to have fooled the reader into thinking that a lyrical effect has been created. The ruse is painfully obvious here. Proulx would at least have drawn the line at something as stale as *august peaks*—especially in an opening paragraph. (She would also have avoided the clumsy echo of *restless* and *relentlessly*.)

WORLD

Olive green of pond water, tea-colored is the newt's body.
Legs stroking, it floats close to the surface, lazily circles the dock's posts, a fish swallowing in the shallows.
Its feet once walked moss, logs—a world and name, *eff*, left behind.
Pinpoints of vermilion freckle its skin. It nudges under floating leaves blown down from the trees. Saturdays, the zebra-striped plane flies up from the neighboring fields.
Its roar follows the tree edge, our pork-chop-shaped parcel of land, turns back at the boundary. Over the woods, over the dock, narrow trails and deer paths, the dead tree where the vulture roosts.
A finite number of times the engine will go up, up. The zebra in the circus ring prances round. Rises the snapping turtle's triangle face from the mud. My wishing to nudge the days larger, longer. A girl's run in the woods at dusk—blue shorts the hunters saw briefly as the deer's flickering of blue sky.

—TALVIKKI ANSEL

It is from Auster, however, that Guterson seems to have learned how to create writerly cadences through tautology: "a clash of sound, discordant," "an immediate blunder, a *faux pas*," "Wyman was gay, a homosexual," "She could see that he was angry, that he was holding it in, not exposing his rage."

On the positive side, Guterson has more of a storytelling instinct than many novelists today. Beneath all the verbal rubble in *Cedars* is a good murder mystery crying out to be heard—feebly, to be sure, but still loud enough for *The New York Times* to have denied the book its "non-genre" bonus of a second review. Guterson also knows that he has no gift for figurative language; outbursts like "a labyrinth of runners as intricate as a network of arteries feeding" are mercifully rare. As a result he sinks below mediocrity as rarely as he rises above it. Only the sex scenes, which even his fans lament, are laughably bad.

"Have you ever done this before?" he whispered.

"Never," answered Hatsue. "You're my only."

The head of his penis found the place it wanted. For a moment he waited there, poised, and kissed her—he took her lower lip between his lips and gently held it there. Then with his hands he pulled her to him and at the same time entered her so that she felt his scrotum slap against her skin. Her entire body felt the rightness of it, her entire body was seized to it. Hatsue arched her shoulder blades—her breasts pressed themselves against his chest—and a slow shudder ran through her.

"It's right," she remembered whispering. "It feels so right, Kabuo."

"*Tadaima aware ga wakatta*," he had answered. "*I understand just now the deepest beauty*."

If Jackie Collins had written that, reviewers would have had a field day with *You're my only*, the searching penis, the shudder's slow run. Thanks to that scrotum slap, which makes you wonder just what Hatsue's body felt the rightness of, the passage fails even on a Harlequin Romance level. But critics gamely overlook the whole mess, because by this point in the book Guterson has already established himself as a Serious Writer—mainly by length and somberness, but also by all those Japanese words.

Almost every fourth amateur reviewer on Amazon.com complains about the repetitiveness of *Snow Falling on Cedars*. *Kirkus Reviews*, on the other hand, called the 345-page novel "as compact as haiku," and Susan Kenney, in *The New York Times*, praised it as "finely wrought and flawlessly written." The novel is required reading in some college English classes, and even history students are being urged to read it, as a source of information about the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. So much, I suppose, for Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973), another good book displaced from the school canon by a bad one.

NO WAY OUT?

At the 1999 National Book Awards ceremony Oprah Winfrey told of calling Toni Morrison to say that she had had to puzzle over many of the latter's sentences. According to Oprah, Morrison's reply was "That, my dear, is called reading." Sorry, my dear Toni, but it's actually called bad writing. Great prose isn't always easy, but it's always lucid; no one of Oprah's intelligence ever had to wonder what Joseph Conrad was trying to say in a particular sentence. This didn't stop the talk-show host from quoting her friend's words with approval. In similar fashion, an amateur reviewer on Amazon.com admitted to having had trouble with Guterson's short stories: "The fault is largely mine. I had been reading so many escape novels that I wasn't in shape to contend with stories full of real thought written in challenging style."

This is what the cultural elite wants us to believe: if our writers don't make sense, or bore us to tears, that can only mean that we aren't worthy of them. In July of last year Bill Goldstein, in *The New York Times*, wrote an article putting the blame for the proliferation of unread best sellers on readers who bite off more "intellectually intimidating" fare than they can chew. Vince Passaro, writing for *Harper's* in 1999, attributed the unpopularity of new short fiction primarily to the fact that it is "smart"—in contrast (he claimed) to the short stories of Hemingway's day. Passaro named Rick Moody as a young talent to watch, and offered this excerpt from "perhaps the best thing he's written," a short story called "Demonology" (1996).

They came in twos and threes, dressed in the fashionable Disney costumes of the year, Lion King, Pocahontas, Beauty and the Beast, or in the costumes of televised superheroes, Protean, shape-shifting, thus arrayed, in twos and threes, complaining it was too hot with the mask on, *Hey, I'm really hot!*, lugging those orange plastic buckets, bartering, haggling with one another, *Gimme your Smarties, please?* as their parents tarried behind, grownups following after, grownups bantering about the schools, or about movies, about local sports, about their marriages, about the difficulties of long marriages; kids sprinting up the next driveway, kids decked out as demons or superheroes or dinosaurs or as advertisements for our multinational entertainment-providers, beating back the restless souls of the dead, in search of sweets.

By the third line you realize you're back in Consumerland. (Moody says he was "utterly blown away" by *White Noise*.) Far from evincing any challenging content, unless you count those feeble jabs at Disney, this passage offers a good example of how little concentration is required by modern "literary" prose. You don't need to remember how that long, chanting sentence began in order to finish it; after all, Moody doesn't seem clear on who is *beating back the restless souls of the dead* either. (The metaphorical verb implies more awareness of the dead than can be attributed to either the

excited children or their chattering parents.) You don't even need to read each word, because everything comes around twice anyway: "Protean, shape-shifting"; "in twos and threes ... in twos and threes"; "complaining it was too hot with the mask on, *Hey, I'm really hot!*"; "as their parents tarried behind, grownups following after"; "in the costumes of televised superheroes ... kids decked out as ... superheroes." None of this can hide Moody's tin ear (*Hey, I'm really hot!*), his unfamiliarity with the world of children (who haggle after they get home—and over less humdrum treats), and the complete absence of sharply observed detail.

All Passaro said to justify quoting that passage was that it combines "autobiography, story, social commentary, and the irony to see them all as a single source of pain." (I think I got the pain part.) This is typical of today's reviewers, who shy away from discussing prose style at length, even when they are praising it as the main reason to buy a book. The reader is either told some nonsense about sentences that "slither and pounce" or given an excerpt in its own graphic box, with no commentary at all. The critic's implication: "If you can't see why that's great writing, I'm not going to waste my time trying to explain." This must succeed in bullying some people, or else all the purveyors of what the critic Paul Fussell calls the "unreadable second-rate pretentious" would have been forced to find honest work long ago. Still, I'll bet that for every three readers who finished Passaro's article, two made a mental note to avoid new short fiction like the plague. Even a nation brainwashed to equate artsiness with art knows when its eyelids are drooping.

People like Passaro, of course, tend to think that anyone indifferent to the latest "smart" authors must be vegetating in front of the television, or at best silently mouthing through a Tom Clancy thriller. The truth is that a lot of us are perfectly happy with literature written before we were born—and why shouldn't we be? The notion that contemporary fiction possesses greater relevance for us because it talks of the Internet or supermodels or familiar brand names is ridiculous. We can see ourselves reflected more clearly in Balzac's Parisians than in a modern American who goes into raptures when his daughter says "Toyota Celica" in her sleep. This is not to say that traditional realism is the only valid approach to fiction. But today's Serious Writers fail even on their own postmodern terms. They urge us to move beyond our old-fashioned preoccupation with content and plot, to focus on form instead—and then they subject us to the least-expressive form, the least-expressive *sentences*, in the history of the American novel. Time wasted on these books is time that could be spent reading something fun. When DeLillo describes a man's walk as a "sort of explanatory shuffle ... a comment on the literature of shuffles" (*Underworld*), I feel nothing; the wordplay is just too insincere, too patently meaningless. But when Vladimir Nabokov talks of midges "continuously darning the air in one spot,"

or the “square echo” of a car door slamming. I feel what Philip Larkin wanted readers of his poetry to feel: “Yes, I’ve never thought of it that way, but that’s how it is.” The pleasure that accompanies this sensation is almost addictive; for many, myself included, it’s the most important reason to read both poetry and prose.

Older fiction also serves to remind us of the power of unaffected English. In this scene from Saul Bellow’s *The Victim* (1947) a man meets a woman at a Fourth of July picnic.

He saw her running in the women’s race, her arms close to her sides. She was among the stragglers and stopped and walked off the field, laughing and wiping her face and throat with a handkerchief of the same material as her silk summer dress. Leventhal was standing near her brother. She came up to them and said, “Well, I *used* to be able to run when I was smaller.” That she was still not accustomed to thinking of herself as a woman, and a beautiful woman, made Leventhal feel very tender toward her. She was in his mind when he watched the contestants in the three-legged race hobbling over the meadow. He noticed one in particular, a man with red hair who struggled forward, angry with his partner, as though the race were a pain and a humiliation which he could wipe out only by winning. “What a difference,” Leventhal said to himself. “What a difference in people.”

Scenes that show why a character falls in love are rarely convincing in novels. This one works beautifully, and with none of the “evocative” metaphor hunting or postmodern snickering that tends to accompany such scenes today. The syntax is simple but not unnaturally terse—a point worth emphasizing to those who think that the only alternative to contemporary writerliness is the plodding style of Raymond Carver. Bellow’s verbal restraint makes the unexpected repetition of *what a difference* all the more touching. The entire novel is marked by the same quiet brilliance. As Christopher Isherwood once said to Cyril Connolly, real talent manifests itself not in a writer’s affectation but “in the exactness of his observation [and] the justice of his situations.”

It’s easy to despair of ever seeing a return to that kind of prose, especially with the cultural elite doing such a quietly efficient job of maintaining the status quo. (Rick Moody received an O. Henry Award for “Demonology” in 1997, whereupon he was made an O. Henry juror himself. And so it goes.) But the paper chain of mediocrity would probably perpetuate itself anyway. Clumsy writing begets clumsy thought, which begets even clumsier writing. The only way out is to look back to a time when authors had more to say than “I’m a Writer!”; when the novel wasn’t just a 300-page caption for the photograph on the inside jacket. A reorientation toward tradition would benefit writers no less than readers. In the early twentieth century it was fashionable in Britain to claim that only a completely new style of writing could address a world undergoing an unprecedented transformation—just as the critic Sven Birkerts claimed in a

recent *Atlantic Unbound* that only the new “aesthetic of exploratory excess” can address a world undergoing ... well, you know. For all that Georgian talk of modernity, it was T. S. Eliot, a man fascinated by the “presence” of the past, who wrote the most-innovative poetry of his time. The lesson for today’s literary community is so obvious that it may seem patronizing to bring it up. But if our writers and critics already respect the novel’s rich tradition—if they can honestly say they got more out of *Moby-Dick* than just a favorite sentence—then why are they so contemptuous of the urge to tell an exciting story?

Moyer Bell and other small publishers are to be commended for reissuing so many older novels. It would be even more encouraging if our national newspapers devoted an occasional full-page review to one of these new editions—or, for that matter, to any novel that has lapsed into undeserved obscurity. And modern readers need to see that intellectual content can be reconciled with a vigorous, fast-moving plot, as in Budd Schulberg’s novel *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941) or John O’Hara’s *Appointment in Samarra* (1934). Patrick Hamilton’s *Hangover Square* (1941) and Roy Fuller’s *The Second Curtain* (1953) are British psychological thrillers written in careful, unaffectedly poetic prose; both could appeal to a wide readership here. By the same token, many of the adults who enjoy Harry Potter would be even happier with Mervyn Peake’s Gormenghast trilogy (1946–1959) if they only knew about it. Suspense fans would be surprised to find how readable William Godwin’s *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) is. Americans should also be encouraged to overcome their growing aversion to translated fiction. To discover Shiga Naoya’s *A Dark Night’s Passing* (1937) and Enchi Fumiko’s *The Waiting Years* (1957), two heartbreaking classics of Japanese fiction, is to realize how little we need a white man’s geisha memoirs.

Feel free to disparage these recommendations, but can anyone outside of the big publishing houses claim that the mere fact of newness should entitle a novel to more of our attention? Many readers wrestle with only one bad book before concluding that they are too dumb to enjoy anything “challenging.” Their first foray into literature shouldn’t have to end, for lack of better advice, on the third page of something like *Underworld*. At the very least, the critics could start toning down their hyperbole. How better to ensure that Faulkner and Melville remain unread by the young than to invoke their names in praise of some new bore every week? How better to discourage clear and honest self-expression than to call Annie Proulx—as Carolyn See did in *The Washington Post*—“the best prose stylist working in English now, bar none”?

Whatever happens, the old American scorn for pretension is bound to reassert itself someday, and dear God, let it be soon. In the meantime, I’ll be reading the kinds of books that Cormac McCarthy doesn’t understand. ▀

SHOW-AND-TELL

A short story

BY GEORGE SINGLETON

Illustrations by Allen Garns

.....

I wasn't old enough to know that my father couldn't have obtained a long-lost letter from the famed lovers Héloïse and Abelard, and since European history wasn't part of my third-grade curriculum, I felt no remorse at the time for bringing the handwritten document (on lined three-hole Blue Horse filler paper), announcing its value, and reading it to the class at Friday show-and-tell. My classmates—who would all grow up to be idiots, in my opinion, since they feared anything outside of Forty-five, South Carolina, thus making them settle down exactly where they got trained, thus shrinking the gene pool even more—brought the usual: starfishes and conch shells bought in Myrtle Beach gift shops, though claimed to have been found during summer vacation; Indian-head pennies given as birthday gifts by grandfathers; the occasional pet gerbil, corn snake, or tropical fish.

My father instructed me how to read the letter, what words to stress, when to pause. I, of course, protested directly after the first dry run. Some of the words and phrases reached beyond my vocabulary. The general tone of the letter, I knew, would only get me playground-taunted by boys and girls alike. My father told me to pipe down and read louder. He told me to use my hands better, and he got out a metronome.

I didn't know that my father—"a widower" is how he told me to describe him, although everyone knew that Mom had run off to Nashville and hadn't died—had once dated Ms. Suber, my teacher. My parents' pasts never came up in conversation, even after my mother ended up tending bar at a place called the Merchant's Lunch, on Lower Broad, more often than she sang on various honky-tonk stages, waiting for representation by a man who would call

her the next Patsy Cline. No, the prom night and homecoming of my father's senior year in high school with Ms. Suber never leaked out in our talks, whether we ate supper in front of the television screaming at Walter Cronkite or played pinball down at the Sunken Gardens Lounge.

I got up in front of the class. I knew that a personal, caring, loving, benevolent God didn't exist, seeing as I had prayed that my classmates would exceed their allotted time, et cetera, et cetera, and then we'd go to recess, lunch, and

one of the mandatory filmstrips that South Carolina elementary school students watched weekly, on topics as tragic and diverse as Friendship, Fire Safety, Personal Hygiene, and Bee Stings. "I have a famous letter written from one famous person to another famous person," I said.

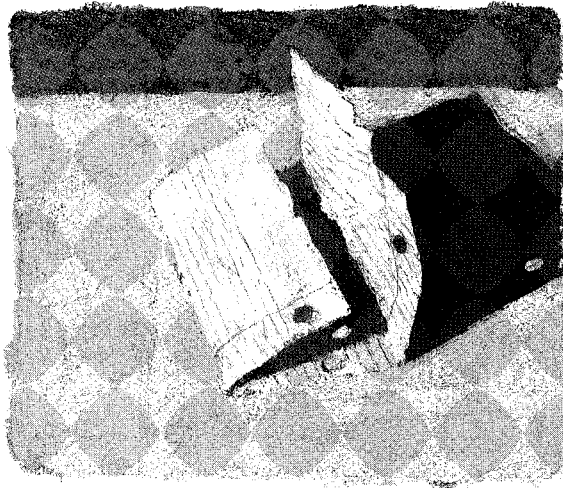
Ms. Suber held her mouth in a tiny O. Nowadays I realize that she was a beauty, but at the time she seemed just another seventy-year-old woman in front of an elementary school class, her corkboard filled with

exclamation marks. She wasn't but thirty-five, really. Ms. Suber motioned for me to move closer to the music stand she also used on Recorder Day. "And what are these famous people's names, Mendal?"

Ricky Hutton, who'd already shown off a ship in a bottle that he didn't make but said he did, yelled out, "My father has a letter from President Johnson's wife thanking him for picking up litter."

"My grandma sent me a birthday card with a two-dollar bill inside," said Libby Belcher, the dumbest girl in the class, who went on to get a doctorate in education and then became superintendent of the school district.

I stood there with my folded document. Ms. Suber said, "Go on."



"I forget who wrote this letter. I mean, they were French people."

"Might it be Napoleon and Josephine?" Ms. Suber produced a smirk that I would see often in my life, from women who immediately recognized any untruth I chose to tell.

I said, "My father told me, but I forget. It's not signed or anything." Which was true.

Ms. Suber pointed at Bill Gilliland and told him to quit throwing his baseball in the air, a baseball supposedly signed by Shoeless Joe Jackson. None of us believed this, seeing as the signature was printed, at best. We never relented on Gilliland, and in due course he used the ball in pickup games until the cover wore off.

I unfolded the letter and read, "My dearest."

"These are French people writing in English, I suppose," Ms. Suber said.

I nodded. I said, "They were smart, I believe. I want to tell you that if I live to be a hundred I won't meet another man like you. If I live to be a hundred there shall be no love to match ours."

The entire class began laughing, of course. My face reddened. I looked at Ms. Suber, but she concentrated on her shoe. "That guy who wrote that 'How Do I Love Thee' poem has nothing on us, my sugar-booger-baby."

"That's enough," Ms. Suber belted out. "You can sit down, Mendal."

I pointed at the letter. I had another dozen paragraphs to go, some of which contained rhymes. I hadn't gotten to the word "throbbing," which showed up fourteen times. "I'm not making any of this up," I said. I walked two steps toward my third-grade teacher, but she stood up and told everyone to go outside except me.

Glenn Flack walked by and said, "You're in trouble, Mendal Dawes." Carol Anderson, who was my third-grade girlfriend, looked as if she was going to cry.

Ms. Suber said, "You've done nothing wrong, Mendal. Please tell your daddy that I got it. When he asks what happened today, just say 'Ms. Suber got it.' Okay?"

I put the letter in my side pants pocket. I said, "My father's a widower."

My father was waiting for me when I got home. I never really knew what he did for a living, outside of driving within a hundred-mile radius of Forty-five, buying up land, and then reselling it when the time was right. He had a knack. That was his word. For a time I thought it was the make of his car. "I drive around all day

and buy land," he said more than once, before and after my mother took off to replace Patsy Cline. "I have a Knack."

I came home wearing a canvas book bag on my back, filled with a math book and an abacus. I said, "Hey, Dad."

He held his arms wide open, as if I were a returning POW. "Did your teacher send back a note to me?"

I reached in my pocket and pulled out the letter from Héloïse to Abelard. I handed it to him and said, "She made me quit reading."

"She made you quit reading? How far along did you get?"

I told him that I had only gotten to the part about "sugar-booger-baby." I said, "Is this one of those lessons in life you keep telling me about, like when we went camping?" My father taught me early on how to tell the difference between regular leaves and poison ivy, when we camped out beside the Saluda River, far from any com-mode, waiting for him to envision which tract would be most salable later.

"Goddamn it to hell. She didn't say anything else after you read the letter?"

My father wore a seersucker suit and a string tie. I said, "She called recess pretty much in the middle of me reading the thing. This is some kind of practical joke, isn't it?"

My father looked at me as if I'd peed on his wing-tips. He said, "Now, why would I do something like that to the only human being I love in this world?"

I couldn't imagine why. Why would a man who—as he liked to tell me often—before my birth had played baseball for the Yankees in the summer and football for the Packers in the winter, and had competed in the Olympics, ever revert to playing jokes on his nine-year-old son? "Ms. Suber seemed kind of mad."

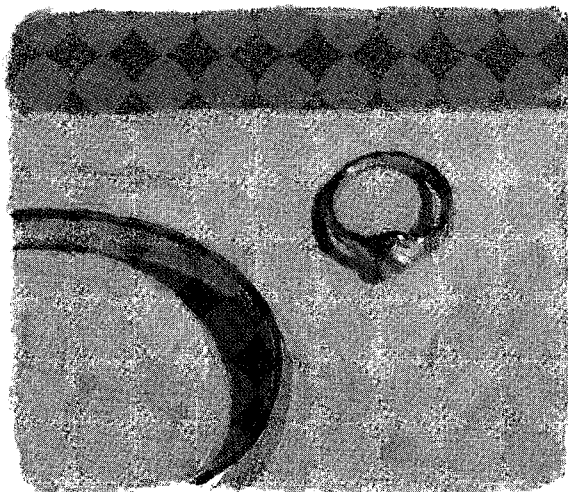
"Did she cry? Did she start crying? Did she turn her head away from y'all and blow her nose into a handkerchief? Don't hold back, Mendal. Don't think that you're embarrassing your teacher or anything for telling the truth. Ms. Suber would want you to tell the truth, wouldn't she?"

I said, "Uh-huh. Probably."

"Uh-huh probably she cried, or uh-huh probably she'd want you to tell the truth?" My father walked to the kitchen backward, pulled a bottle of bourbon from a shelf, and drank from it straight. Twenty years later I would do the same thing, but over a dog that needed to be put to sleep.

I said, "Uh-huh. I told her you were a widower and everything. We got to go to recess early."

My father kept walking backward. He took a glass from



the cabinet and cracked an ice tray. He put cubes in the glass, poured bourbon into it, and stood staring at me as if I had told secrets to the enemy. "Did she say that she's thinking about getting married?"

I said, "She didn't say anything."

"I've gotten ahold of a genuine Cherokee Indian bracelet and ring," my father said the next Thursday night. "No BS here on this one. Your mother's father—that would be your grandfather—gave them to us a long time ago as a wedding present. He got them when he was traveling through Cherokee country. Your grandfather used to sell cotton, you know. Sometimes the Cherokees needed cotton. Sometimes they didn't have money, and he traded things for cotton. That's the way things go."

I said, "I was thinking about taking some pine cones." I had found some pine cones that were so perfect it wasn't funny. They looked like Christmas trees built to scale. "I was going to take a rock and say it was a meteorite."

"No, no. Take some of my Cherokee Indian jewelry, Mendal. I don't mind. I don't care! Hot damn, I didn't even remember having the things, so it won't matter none if they get broken or stolen. This is the real thing, Bubba."

What could I do? I wasn't but nine years old, and early on I'd been taught to do whatever my elders said, outside of drinking whiskey and smoking cigarettes when they got drunk and made the offer, usually at the Sunken Gardens Lounge. I thought, *Maybe I can take my father's weird jewelry and stick it in my desktop. Maybe I can stick a pine cone inside my lunch box.* "Yessir."

"I won't have it any other way," he said. "Wait here."

My father went back to what used to be my mother's and his bedroom. He opened up a wooden box he had fashioned in high school shop and pulled out a thin silver bracelet plus a one-pearl ring. I didn't know that these trinkets had once adorned the left arm of my third-grade teacher, right before she broke up with my father and went off to college, and long before she graduated, taught in some other school system for ten years, and then came back to her home town.

I took the trinkets in a small cotton sack. My father told me that he'd come get me for lunch if I wanted him to, that I didn't need to pack a bologna sandwich and banana as always. I went to the refrigerator and made my own and then left through the back door.

Glenn Flack started off show-and-tell with an x-ray of

his mother's ankle. She'd fallen off the front porch trying to run from bees—something the rest of us knew not to do, seeing as we'd learned how to act in one of the weekly filmstrips. I got called next and said, "I have some priceless Cherokee Indian artifacts to show y'all. The Cherokee

Indians had a way with hammering and chiseling." My father had made me memorize this speech.

I showed my classmates what ended up having been bought at Rey's Jewelers. Ms. Suber said, "Let me take a look at that" and got up to take the bracelet from my hand. She peered at it and then held it at arm's length and said, "This looks like it says 'sterling' on the inside, Mendal. I believe you might've picked up the wrong Indian jewelry to bring to school."

"Indian giver, Indian giver, Indian giver!" Melissa Beasley yelled out. It wasn't a taboo term back then. This was a time, understand, before we knew to use terms like "Native American-head penny" instead of "Indian-head penny," like I said before.

I said, "I just know what my dad told me. That's all I know." I took the bracelet from Ms. Suber, pulled out the ring, and stood there as if offering a Milk-Bone to a stray and skittish dog.

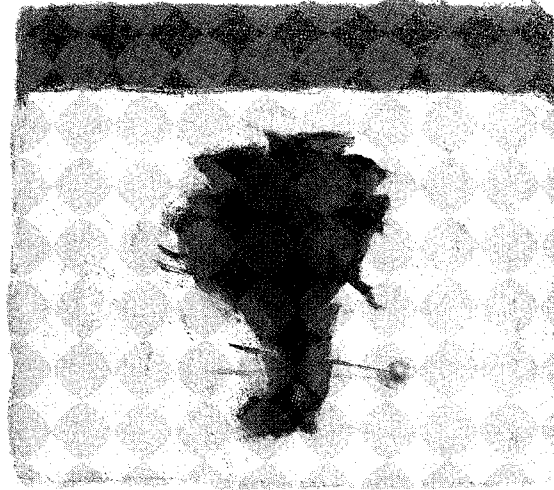
Ms. Suber said, "I've had enough of this" and told me to return to my desk. I put the pearl ring on my thumb and stuck the bracelet around the toe of my tennis shoe. Ms. Suber said, "Has your father gone insane lately, Mendal?"

It embarrassed me, certainly, and if she had said it twenty or thirty years later, I could've sued her for harassment, slander, and making me potentially agoraphobic. My desk was in the last row. Every student turned toward me except Shirley Ebo, the only black girl in the entire school, four years after integration. She looked forward, as always, ready to approach the music stand and explain her show-and-tell object, a face jug made by an old, old relative of hers named Dave the Slave.

I said, "My father has a Knack." Maybe I said nothing, really, but I thought about my father's Knack. I waited.

Ms. Suber sat back down. She looked at the ceiling and said, "I'm sorry, Mendal. I didn't mean to yell at you. Everyone go on to recess."

And so it continued for six weeks. I finally told my father that I couldn't undergo any more humiliation, that I would play hooky, that I would show up at school and say I had forgotten to bring my show-and-tell. I said, "I'm only going to take these stupid things you keep



telling me stories about if it brings in some money, Dad.”

Not that I was ever a capitalist or anything, but I figured early on that show-and-tell would end up somehow hurting my penmanship or spelling grade, and that maybe I needed to start saving money in order to get a head start in life should I not get into college. My father said, “That sounds fair enough. How much will you charge me to take this old, dried Mayan wrist corsage and matching boutonniere?”

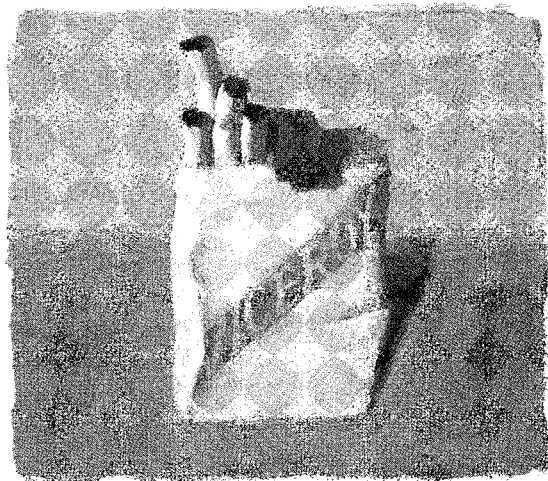
I said, “Five bucks each.”

My father handed them over. If the goddamn school system had ever shown a worthwhile Friday filmstrip concerning inductive logic, I would’ve figured out back then that when Ms. Suber and my father had had their horrific and execrable high school breakup, my father had gone over to her house and gathered up everything he’d ever bestowed on her, from birthday to Valentine’s Day to special three-month anniversary and so on. He had gifts she’d given him too, I supposed much later, though I doubted they were worthy of monogamy.

But I didn’t know logic. I thought only that my father hated the school system, had no trust whatsoever in public education, and wanted to drive my teacher to a nervous breakdown in order to get her to quit. Or, I thought, it was his way of flirting—that since my mother had “died,” he wanted to show a prospective second wife some of the more spectacular possessions he could offer a needful woman.

He said, “I can handle ten dollars a show-and-tell session, for two items. Remind me not to give you an hourglass. I don’t want you charging me per grain of sand.”

This was all by the first of October. By Christmas break I’d brought in cuff links worn by Louis Quatorze, a fountain pen used by the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence (my father tutored me on stressing “Independence” when I announced my cherished object to the class), a locket once owned by Elmer the glue inventor, thus explaining why the thing couldn’t be opened, a pack of stale Viceroy’s that once belonged to the men who raised the American flag on Iwo Jima. I brought in more famous love letters, all on lined Blue Horse paper: from Ginger Rogers to Fred Astaire, from Anne Hathaway to Shakespeare, from all of Henry VIII’s wives to him. One letter, according to my dad, was from Plato to Socrates, though he said it wasn’t the original, and that he’d gone to the trouble of learning Greek in order to translate the thing.



Ms. Suber became exasperated with each new disclosure. She moved from picking names at random or in alphabetical order to always choosing me last. My classmates voted me Most Popular, Most Likely to Succeed, and Third Grade President, essentially because I got us ten more minutes of recess every Friday.

I walked down to the County Bank every Friday after school and deposited the money my father had forked over in a regular savings account. This was a time before IRAs. It was a time before stock portfolios, mutual funds, and the like. They gave me a toaster for starting the account and a dinner plate every time I walked in with ten dollars or more. After a few months I could’ve hosted a dinner party for twelve.

On Saturday mornings, more often than not, I drove with my father from place to place, looking over land he had bought or planned to buy. He had acquired a few acres of woodland before my birth, and soon thereafter the Army Corps of Engineers came in, flooded the Savannah River, and made my father’s property near lakefront. He sold that parcel, took that money, and bought more land in an area that bordered what would become I-95. He couldn’t go wrong. My father was

not unlike the fool who threw darts at a map and went with his gut instinct. He would buy useless swampland, and someone else would soon insist on buying that land at twice to ten times his cost in order to build a golf course, a subdivision, or a nuclear-power facility. I had no idea what he did between these ventures, outside of reading and wondering. How else would he know about Abelard and Héloïse, or even Socrates and Plato? He hadn’t gone to college. He hadn’t taken

some kind of correspondence course.

We drove, and I stuck my head out the window like the dog I had owned before my mother took him to Nashville. We’d get to some land, pull down a dirt road usually, and my father would stare hard for ten or fifteen minutes. He barely turned his head from side to side, and he never turned off the engine. Sometimes he’d say at the end, “I think I got a fouled spark plug,” or “You can tell that that gas additive’s working properly.”

He never mentioned people from history, or the jewelry of the dead. I took along Hardy Boys mysteries but never opened the covers. Finally, one afternoon, I said, “Ms. Suber wants to know if you’re planning on coming to the PTA meeting. I forgot to tell you.”

My father turned off the ignition. He reached beneath his seat and pulled out a can of beer and a church key. We sat parked between two gullies, somewhere in Greenwood County. "Hot damn, boy, you need to tell me these things. When is it?"

I said, "I forgot. I got in so much trouble Friday that I forgot." I'd taken a tortoise to show-and-tell and said his name was John the Baptist. At first Ms. Suber seemed delighted. When she asked why I had named him John the Baptist, I said, "Watch this." I screamed, "John the Baptist!" When he retreated into his shell and lost his head, I nodded. She had me sit back down. None of my classmates got the joke.

"The PTA meeting's on Tuesday. It's on Tuesday." I wore a pair of cut-off blue jeans with the bottoms cut into one-inch strips. My mother used to make them for me when I'd grown taller but hadn't gained weight around the middle. I had on my light-blue Little League T-shirt, with SUNKEN GARDENS on the front and 69 for my number on the back. My father had insisted that I get that number, and that I would thank him one day.

"Hell, yes. Do I need to bring anything? I mean, is this one of those meetings where parents need to bring food? I know how to make potato salad. I can make potato salad and cole slaw, you know."

"She just asked me to ask if you'd show up. That's all she said, I swear."

My father looked out at what I understood to be another wasteland. Empty beer cans were scattered in front of us, and the remains of a haphazard bonfire someone had made right in the middle of a path. "Maybe I should call her up and ask if she needs anything."

Although I didn't understand the depth of my father's obsession, I said, "Ms. Suber won't be in town until that night. We have a substitute on Monday, 'cause she has to go to a funeral somewhere."

My father drank from his beer. He handed the can over and told me to take little sips at first. I said, "Mom wouldn't want you to give me beer."

He nodded. "Mom wouldn't want you to do a lot of things, just like she didn't want me to do a lot of things. But she's not here, is she? Your momma's spending all her time praying that she never gets laryngitis, while the rest of us hope she does."

I didn't know that my father had been taking Fridays off in order to see the school secretary, feign needing to leave me a bag lunch, and then stand looking through the vertical window of my classroom door while I expounded the rarity of a letter sweater once worn by General Custer, or whatever. When the PTA meeting came around, I went with my father, though no other students attended. Pretty much it was only parents, teachers, and a couple of the lunch ladies, who had volunteered to serve a punch of

ginger ale and grape juice. My father entered Ms. Suber's classroom and approached her as if she were a newspaper boy he'd forgotten to pay. He said, "I thought you'd eventually send a letter home asking for a conference. I thought you'd finally buckle under." He said, "Go look at the goldfish, Mendal," and pointed toward our aquarium.

I looked at the corner of the room. My classmates' parents were sitting at tiny desks, their knees bobbing like the shells of surfaced turtles. My third-grade teacher said, "I know you think this is cute, but it's not. I don't know why you think you can re-court me however many years later after what you did to me back then."

My father pushed me in the direction of the aquarium. Ms. Suber waved and smiled at Glenn Flack's parents, who were walking in. I said, "Can I go sit in the car?"

Ms. Suber said, "You stay right here, Mendal."

"I might not have been able to go to college like you did, Lola, but I've done good for myself," my father said. I thought one thing only: *Lola?*

"I know you have, Lee. I know you've done well. And let me be the first to say how proud I am of you, and how I'm sorry if I hurt you, and that I've seen you looking in the window when Mendal does his bogus show-and-tells." She pointed at the window in the door. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson walked in. "I need to start this thing up."

My father said to me, "If you want to go sit in the car, go ahead." He handed me the keys, leaned down, and said, "There's a beer in the glove compartment, son."

Let me say that this was South Carolina in 1968. Although my memory's not perfect, I think that at the time, neither drinking nor driving was against the law for minors, nor was smoking cigarettes before the age of twelve. Five years later I would drive my mini-bike to the Sunken Gardens, meet one of the black boys twirling trays out in the parking lot, order my eight-pack of Miller ponies, and have it delivered to me without conscience or threat of law.

I pretended to go into the parking lot but circled around to the outside of Ms. Suber's classroom. I stood beneath one of the six jalousies, crouched, and listened. Ms. Suber welcomed the parents and said that it was an exciting year. She said something about how all of us would have to take a national test later on to see how we compared with the rest of the nation. She said something about a school play.

Ms. Suber warned parents of a looming head-lice epidemic. She paced back and forth and asked everyone to introduce himself or herself. Someone asked if the school would ever sponsor another cake-and-pie sale in order to buy new recorders. My father said he'd be glad to have a potato-salad-and-cole-slaw sale. I didn't hear the teacher's answer. From where I crouched I could only look up at the sky and notice how some stars twinkled madly while others shone hard and fast like mica afire.

BORN IN 1799,
HONORÉ BALZAC

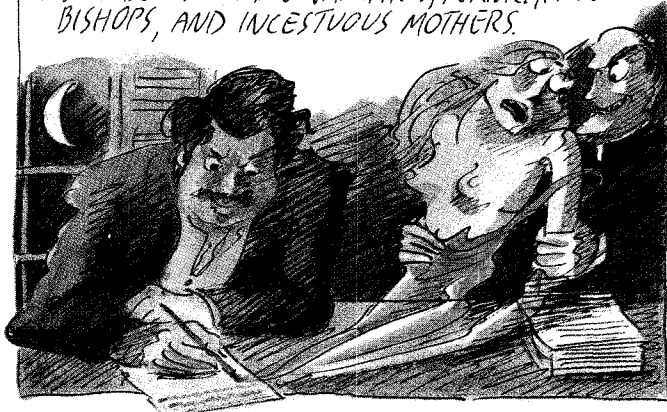
IS IMMEDIATELY SENT TO A
WET NURSE IN ANOTHER TOWN.
HE STAYS FOUR YEARS.



HIS RETURN HOME COINCIDES WITH MADAME
BALZAC'S INTEREST IN A YOUNG OFFICER.
ONCE AGAIN HE IS PACKED OFF—THIS TIME
TO LIVE WITH THE ORATORIAN MONKS.



A LAW-SCHOOL DROPOUT, HONORÉ DEVOTES TWO
YEARS TO A DULL PLAY ABOUT OLIVER CROMWELL.
HE IS MORE SUCCESSFUL WITH NOVELETTES
ABOUT BLOODSUCKING VAMPIRES, FORNICATING
BISHOPS, AND INCESTUOUS MOTHERS.



UNEXPECTEDLY, HIS
"LA PHYSIOLOGIE DE MARIAGE"
IS A POPULAR SUCCESS. AS
BEFITS A BOULEVARDIER,
HE SPORTS JEWELLED
CANES, BUYS GLOVES
BY THE DOZEN, AND
FREQUENTS THE
BEST TAILORS
IN PARIS.



NOW FAMOUS, HE RECEIVES A LETTER FROM A MYSTERIOUS
POLISH COUNTESS. LIKE HER SISTER, MISTRESS TO PUSHKIN,
MME. HANSKA IS LOOKING TO EXPAND
HER HORIZONS. THEIR VOLUMINOUS
CORRESPONDENCE LEADS TO A MEET-
ING. THE COUNTESS IS
SHOCKED TO FIND HER TRUE
LOVE SHORT, FAT, AND
WITH GAPS
BETWEEN
HIS TEETH.



HIS BRILLIANT MIND SOON CONQUERS
BOTH COUNTESS AND AGING COUNT,
WHO, ALAS, LIVES FOR ANOTHER
DECADE. BY THEN THE WIDOW
FINDS MARRIAGE TO A
ROTUND, DEBT-RIDDEN
WRITER LESS ATTRACTIVE.
SHE STALLS FOR SEVEN
MORE YEARS.



LITERARY LIVES by Edward Sorel

CONSUMED BY MATERNAL DEPRIVATION, HE IS ATTRACTED TO OLDER WOMEN. EVERY SEDUCTION BEGINS WITH "I NEVER KNEW A MOTHER'S LOVE." THIS GAMBIT PROVES ENORMOUSLY PRODUCTIVE.

JE NAI JAMAIS
CONNU L'AMOUR
MATERNEL



BUT NIGHTS ARE DEVOTED TO ART. GARBED AS A MONK, BALZAC WORKS TO PLACATE HIS MUSE AND HIS CREDITORS BOTH. TO MOLLIFY THE LATTER HE SPRINKLES THEIR NAMES IN HIS NOVELS AND PRAISES THEIR WORKMANSHIP FOR ALL PARIS TO READ.



IN 1850 THEY AT LAST MARRY. THE BRIDE IS SWOLLEN WITH GOUT, THE GROOM COUGHS UP BLOOD. BALZAC FACES THE REALITY THAT "LA COMEDIE HUMAINE" WILL NEVER BE FINISHED. ON THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 18, IN PARIS (THE DOCTOR GONE, THE COUNTESS ASLEEP), BALZAC DIES—IN HIS MOTHER'S ARMS AT LAST.



By the time I reached high school, my mother had moved from Nashville to New Orleans and then from New Orleans to Las Vegas. She never made it as a country singer or a blues singer, but she seemed to thrive as a hostess of sorts. As I crouched there beneath a window jutting out above boxwoods, I thought of my mother and imagined what she might be doing at the moment my father experienced his first PTA meeting. Was she crooning to conventioners? Was she sitting in a back room worrying over pantyhose? That's what I thought, I swear to God. Everyone in Ms. Suber's classroom seemed to be talking with cookies in their mouths. I heard my father laugh hard twice—once when Ms. Suber said she knew that her students saw her as a witch, and another time when she said she knew that her students went home complaining that she didn't spank exactly the way their parents spanked.

Again, this was in the middle of the Vietnam War. Spanking made good soldiers.

My third-grade teacher said that she didn't have anything else to say, and told her students' parents to feel free to call her up should they have questions concerning grades, expectations, or field trips. She said she appreciated anyone who wanted to help chaperone kids or to work after school in a tutoring capacity. I stood up and watched my friends' parents leave single file, my father last in line.

Fifteen minutes after sitting in the car, five minutes after everyone else had driven out of the parking lot, I climbed out the passenger side and crept back to Ms. Suber's window. I expected my father to have Lola Suber in a headlock, or backed up against the Famous Christians of the World corkboard display. I didn't foresee their having moved desks against the walls in order to make a better dance floor.

My father held my third-grade teacher in a way I'd seen him hold a woman only once before: one Fourth of July he had danced with my mother in the back yard while the neighbors shot bottle rockets straight up. My mother had placed her head on his shoulder and smiled, her eyes raised to the sky. Lola Suber didn't look upward. She didn't smile either. My father seemed to be humming, or talking low. I couldn't hear exactly what went on, but years later he confessed that he had set forth everything he meant to say and do, everything he hoped she taught the other students and me when it came to matters of passion.

I did hear Lola Suber remind him that they had broken up because she had decided to have a serious and exclusive relationship with Jesus Christ.

There amid the boxwoods I hunkered down and thought only about the troubles I might have during future show-and-tells, I swear to God. I stood back up, saw them dancing, and returned to the car. I would let my father open the glove compartment later. ■

PURSUIITS & RETREATS

TRAVEL

REAL PLACES

A wastewater-treatment facility, a fish-processing plant, and other prime tourist attractions in and around Boston

BY EMILY HIESTAND

.....

The newest aid to navigation along the New England coast is a cluster of ovoid structures that loom 130 feet tall, and rather perkily for such giants, on the tip of Deer Island, in Boston Harbor. The eggs, as they are commonly called (and there are a dozen), cut a dashing, futuristic figure against the blue-green Atlantic: Rem Koolhaas meets the Jetsons meets Fabergé. One warm summer morning last year I was zooming to the top of one egg in an industrial-strength elevator along with six visiting Sri Lankan engineers. As we stepped out onto a catwalk, a process engineer, Jeff McAuley, said of the egg below us, "This could blow up anytime."

He was kidding. We were perfectly safe—I think—but McAuley was getting our attention about conditions deep inside the structure. Sometimes mistaken by passing mariners for a luxury condo complex, the eggs are habitable only by microorganisms. "They are like your stomach," one of the engineers explained, adding in a polite fluster, "not like your personal stomach, Madame, but the stomach of the human body." Technically anaerobic digesters, these Big Berthas are the most dramatic feature of a new state-of-the-art plant that treats and dispatches the effluents of metropolitan Boston, handling the task so well that for infrastructure cognoscenti Deer Island is all the rage—a must-see.

The Sri Lankan engineers were almost bubbly with excitement about the facility. Me too. The operation room rivals the deck of the Starship *Enterprise*; there are monster pumps, and

in the dome of each egg a lovely oculus, a functional cousin of that calm, all-seeing eye in the Pantheon. But what really sends me is the transformation this plant is working on Boston's once sullied harbor, restoring it to a sparkling realm clean enough to please bluefish and seals. And people, who are rediscovering the harbor islands—a sapphire necklace of tide pools, wild roses, swimming coves, and ruins of, for instance, the Asylum for Indigent Boys. From the catwalk windows now the view was of sailboats and water taxis, the Boston skyline ghostly in the distance, and, directly below, the plant itself—a sprawling Rube Goldberg number with Corten-steel stacks, clarifying ponds, and pipes galore, all of it surrounded by the Atlantic and coursed by fresh sea breezes.

The Deer Island plant was but one stop on a continuing journey I have made through some of greater Boston's finest infrastructure. From the egg I could almost see three other sites I have recently explored: the Pigeon Cove fish-processing plant, up the coast on Cape Ann; venerable Boston Light, at the harbor entrance; and, near the city's waterfront, the vast Central Artery highway-construction site.

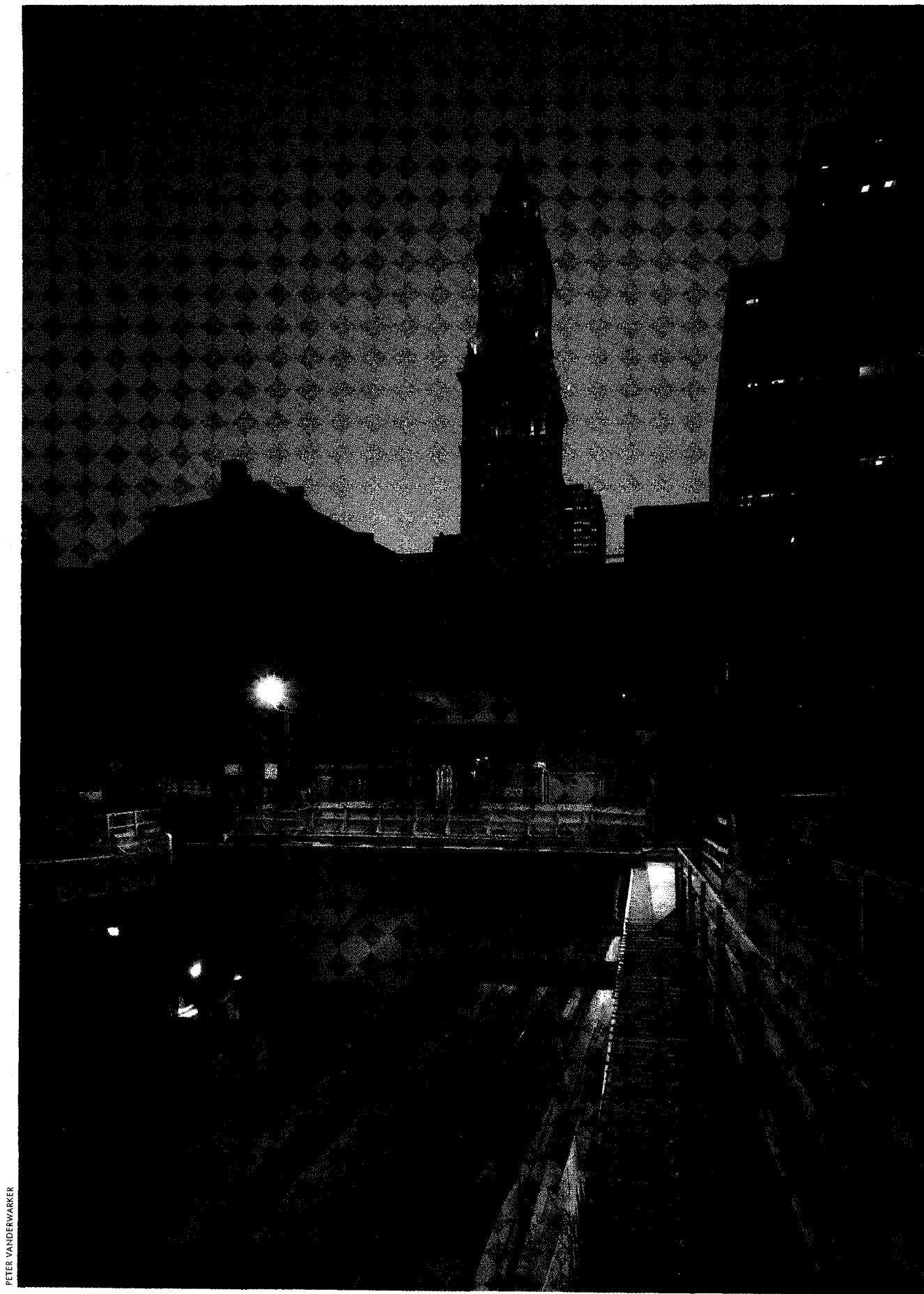
I wasn't raised to be the sort of girl who thrills to wastewater-treatment plants. Born southern just as the 1950s got under way, I received a dose of the fading idea that certain things—things with engines, things that shot flames, things that involved lug wrenches or voltage—were not the concern of a lady.

It almost worked. But infrastructure lay all around, shimmering and intriguing: those sun-baked gray boxes with electrical coils inside the chain-link fence behind the dry cleaner's; the flying saucer on legs that was the town water tower; even the forbidden, ultra-secret uranium labs of my first home town, Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Every time life gave me a chance, I found that I liked to poke around the hefty stuff—the bridges, power plants, shipping terminals, factories, processing plants, and waterworks that make up the bones and muscles, the sinews and spine, and the GI tract of every industrialized community on earth.

I like the word "infrastructure," too, a robust double trochee with a slight syncopation. "Infra" is from Latin, meaning "underneath or lower down than." As "infra dig" means "beneath one's dignity," "infrastructure" means "beneath the structure." It is a word that colludes with Western culture's poignant old hope to, by golly, figure out what's really going on. When I looked up "infrastructure" recently, I found that the way I am using it here—to mean the public works and subservices of an industrial economy—evolved from more specific meanings. When it entered English, in the 1920s, it was generally used to describe military installations (naval bases, cavalry barracks, and the like), as it had been in its original French. It promptly was applied to the tunnels and culverts of railroad lines. Once linked with the railroad—presto, "infrastructure" was free to travel. Soon it could be found signifying the subparts or underlying system of just about anything, even something as ephemeral as sound, as the metrical frame of jazz.

As a partisan of physical infrastructure, I have noticed that if the entity in

Boston's Central Artery project



PETER VANDEWARKER

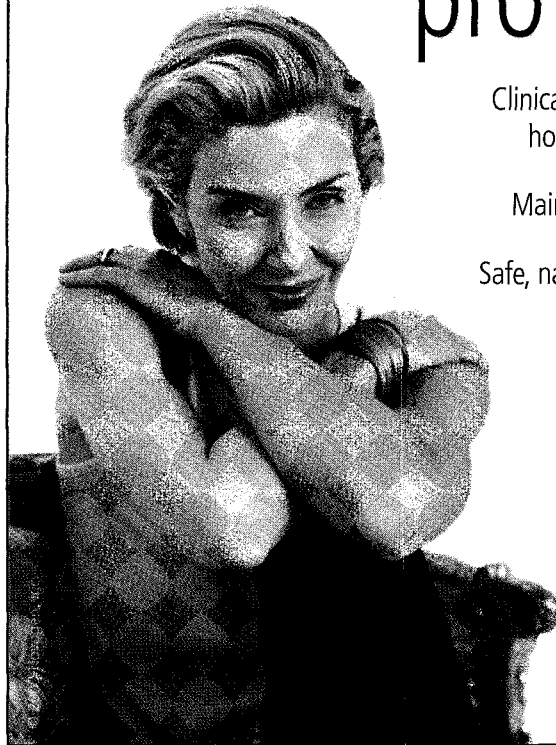
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question is ancient and lying in ruin, if it is a Roman aqueduct or the Great Wall of China or the cistern at Mycenae, it is considered highly visitable. But with a few notable exceptions—the Parisian sewer system, the Golden Gate Bridge—most of our latter-day infrastructure is ignored by travel guides and rarely figures in the traveler's portrait of a place. How odd. A whole genre of monuments to human ingenuity and nature's forces exists in our very midst, as big as life, laced with miracles and wonders, and yet so little remarked as to be almost invisible. Do we overlook these places on purpose, because they make up a shadow city on which the fashionable city rests? ("What's landfill," the poet Amy Clampitt asked, "but the backside of civility?")

Well, sure. Infrastructure facilities can be raw, noisy, dangerous, messy, or all of the above, and when I first began exploring these bastions of the utilitarian, I wasn't entirely sure why they appealed so to my imagination. I work in words and pictures. I'm afraid of our basement. And I'm fond of irony and play, which are in short supply in infrastructure. (When delivering water for a bath or for putting out a fire, you really don't want an ironic pump. You don't want a playfully subversive or deconstructed pump. What you want—mark me closely—is a pump that pumps.) But I've always been keen to go inside, to ask how and why, for what purpose, at what cost; and I soon realized that an expedition to an ordinary electric plant or marine terminal is a terrific way to get behind the scenes fast—that a few hours at a lock or toll bridge, chatting up the operators, invariably reveals truths about a city or an area that you simply cannot discover in its cafés, shops, and museums. That must be because infrastructure is essentially nesting on a grand scale, embodying power, creativity, and our current schemes—for better or worse—for conducting life on earth.

Visits to infrastructure facilities give the traveler techie info, good shoptalk, insight into the big sustainability puzzles, more fun than you might imagine, and also deep respect for the souls who build and tend these places. At Deer Island, I ate lunch on the seawall with a

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young mason whose father and grandfather had labored on earlier infrastructure gigs. "My dad built I-93," he told me proudly, "and my granddad built the Boston and Maine railroad." I loved the way this man gave his forebears total credit for the massive transportation projects, as if the two of them were his own personal Paul Bunyans—which, of course, they are.

Luckily, my husband, Peter, is something of a public-works hound himself. Together we have toured a windmill power-generating station on a North Sea island; a catfish-farm-equipment manufactory in the Mississippi Delta; a train yard in Tokyo, where we learned that the Japanese have named their fastest train *Nozomi*, which translates roughly as *Wish*; a Vermont dairy plant that purifies its runoff by sending it through a bed of aquatic plants that emulates a cleansing marsh; the power station at Niagara Falls, where we touched a turbine the size of a California redwood; and a "wafer fab" in Grenoble, France, one of the rare facilities that make the silicon chips that make the information society go. (*Vive la France* note: In a French fab high-tech workers do not wear the same shapeless white coveralls, the "bunny suits," worn by their counterparts elsewhere. *Horreurs! Mais non!* Workers in a French fab wear form-fitting numbers in trendy acidic colors.) Fond as I am of such faraway field trips, some of the most moving and memorable expeditions have been to facilities in my own city. Close to home it is easy to connect dots—from a substation to your living-room lamp, from a watershed stream to your bathtub, even from the present to the past. The spring day that Peter and I locked through the local Amelia Earhart Dam in a canoe, we were following the annual spawning route that has been taken for millennia by alewives, the little fish that Squanto taught the Pilgrims to use.

In America most infrastructure actually belongs to Us, the People, and we are free to sally forth to review our big stuff and talk with the people who run it. What the heck are they doing in there anyway? Because these are working facilities, a call ahead to request a visit is essential. The managers almost always say

yes; they may not have an official tour, but they are usually pleased that citizens have taken notice, and are proud to show their operation. It helps to be enthusiastic, to let them know you come in peace. Of course, if you've got some beef with your power plant (because, say, it isn't a solar power plant, when—jeez, Louise—it could be), that's also an excellent reason to pay a call. Ground rules vary; you may be asked to come on a certain afternoon, to wear sturdy shoes, or to don a hard hat and safety goggles. Assuming you are nicely suited up, mentally, we can head out to three of my favorite sites in and around Boston.

Last summer, for a romantic getaway, Peter and I drove up to Gloucester, on nearby Cape Ann—a location we chose for the bedrock allure of its traditional maritime community, and so that we could tour the Pigeon Cove fish plant. We treated ourselves to a stay in the historic Brick House. Presided over by two hospitable cosmopolitans, Nadia Rosenthal and Alan Sawyer, The Brick House has fireplaces, fine espresso, a garden, and an airy room from which we could watch the fishing fleet powering out to sea at dawn. Only a stroll from the harbor, the inn is also close by Caffè Sicilia, which is a wormhole to Italy, and the Boulevard Oceanview Restaurant, treasured for its mussels and Portuguese kale soup. On a Monday morning Peter and I set forth early, walking to the fish plant, located at the head of the harbor. (We bypassed Gloucester's slime-eel plant, which freezes and ships eels to Korea, where they are made into fancy boots or fertilizer, but you can delight eight-year-olds merely by saying "slime-eel plant.")

"We are jamming by six A.M.," Steve Parkes, the manager, said, easing around a stack of farmed mussels and onto his loading dock. Elton John was tearing it up on the radio; fish processors hustled about in orange overalls, white rubber boots, baseball caps on backwards. I first learned about Pigeon Cove when I asked a fishmonger at our local market the provenance of the good-looking arctic char he was wrapping up. All his fresh fish comes through this plant, owned by the Whole

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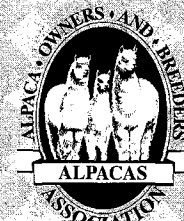
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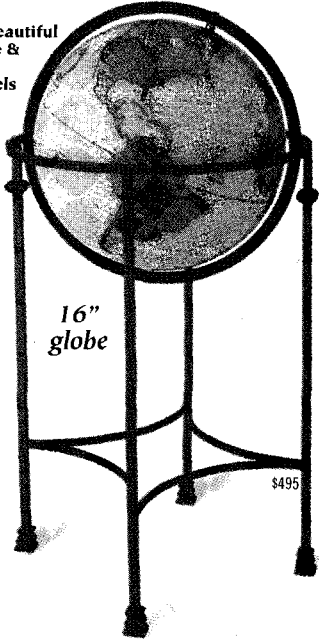
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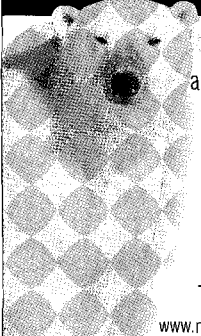
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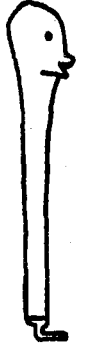


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Foods chain, which pays admirably careful attention both to product quality and to the overall health of fisheries. That morning fish were streaming into the plant from land and sea—arriving by truck from the Boston fish market and being offloaded from a local trawler, the *Katherine V*. On the trucking platform skids rolled by draped with huge silver-gray Australian swordfish. Headless and tailless, the fish were still six feet long, plump, and gleaming, their cavities packed with shaved ice. The sword buyer, who referred to these creatures as "the chosen fish," demonstrated the core-sampling technique that helps him choose and then held up a cylinder of pale flesh. He said, "With this, I can tell you the whole *biography* of a fish." As Parkes led Peter and me to the cutting room, we passed a sign that read WELCOME TO GLOUCESTER—A QUAIN'T DRINKING VILLAGE WITH A FISHING PROBLEM.

The fishing problem that haunts Gloucester these days shadows the entire Gulf of Maine, once famously laden with shellfish, cod, and sole. Over the past twenty-five years this richest of fisheries has collapsed, so these days a trip to Pigeon Cove is a chance not only to marvel at the world-class tattoos sported by crews offloading the daily catch but also to tiptoe into the intense, nearly epistemological conundrum swirling over the diminished North Atlantic fisheries. Is the Gulf of Maine overfished? Yes. And there agreement ends, with the fishing community believing that stocks are rebounding more quickly than fishery managers—the "fishcrats"—have been able to determine, and with discord over harvesting regulations, ways of counting fish, and even what counts as fact.

A modern fish plant is an efficient, technological operation. And it is a liminal zone, a place where one life form begins to be alchemized into another. In Pigeon Cove's chilly cutting room four people were turning the enormous swordfish into pale, rosy steaks. These are the stations of the fish: descaling, filleting, skinning, rinsing, candling, packing. No shaman stood by to give ceremonial thanks, but the glossy wet beauty of the marine world was every-

where present, and Pigeon Cove has an aura entirely different from that of a factory working with an inorganic substance like plastic or metal. The top cutter is a slight, wiry man named Hieu Van Do, who makes fillets his co-workers call "little masterpieces." At the candling table a young man wearing heavy gloves and layered sweatshirts studiously reviewed Van Do's fillets through an intense light, scanning for tiny bones, bruises, and parasites. "Yep," he said cheerfully, "they're sometimes in there—but not when they leave *my* table."

Outside, on the warm, sunny dock, fish were still flowing from the trawler. It's a rugged blue vessel owned by Matt Vitello, a Portuguese-American fisherman whose hard work typifies this endangered community. A winch lifted bins of whiting from the hold and swung them onto the dock, where they were weighed, smothered with fluffy ice, packed onto pallets, and hefted onto a conveyer belt that trundled them into the plant. The fishermen offloading the *Katherine V* wore foul-weather pants, high boots, and the omnipresent baseball caps on backwards. One of them was going for, and mostly achieving, the Fabio look—ripped biceps, gold chain, a mane of streaky blond hair. "Watch out," he called, as some fish goo sloshed toward my open-toed sandals. He actually took my elbow to escort me to drier ground, and I felt like a female reporter on her first day in the Lakers locker room. Parkes grinned. "You know," he said, "the scientists were screaming about the fishery for a long time, and they were right. At the same time, the regulations are killing the small inshore guys like Vitello. Can they hang on until the fish come back? Man, I hope so, because without these guys the port of Gloucester would be unrecognizable."

Although infrastructure facilities are, like everything else, steeped in chaos and made of dancing atoms, they tend to be more stable than a lot of other things. To anyone familiar with the mutability of, say, language, it is impressive when something persists in a given shape for many decades. Perhaps the finest local example of this endurance can be found on Little Brew-

ster Island, a windswept, wave-washed outcropping in the outer harbor, where stands the oldest working lighthouse station in North America. For nearly 300 years Boston Light has shone its beam, flashing every ten seconds, to mark the harbor entrance and warn mariners off the treacherous Shag Rocks. Long accessible only to Coast Guard personnel, the lighthouse recently opened its door to civilians.

Fans of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* will be glad to know that it took me many attempts to reach Boston Light. My excursion was twice canceled owing to high winds and lightning storms. When, at last, a fine fall day dawned this past October, the toothed, primitive sumacs on the harbor islands were flame-red. Peter and I set out from Fan Pier on a salty wooden vessel, the MV *Hurricane*, along with ten other passengers. The voyage out took about an hour, during which we threaded among several of the thirty-one harbor islands, widely admired for the adventure and repose they offer so near an urban hive, and for their quirky names, among them Moon, Spectacle, Grape, Gallop's, Ragged, and Bumpkin.

Little Brewster is one of the remotest islands, exposed to the wild storms that lash out of the northeast, and yet it is astonishingly orderly—a tidy and freshly painted place that recalls an air-brushed postcard from 1940s Maine. Or a Jungian archetype. We were met at the dock by the keeper (that's what he's called) and led onto a tiny dot of earth dominated by a tall white tapering tower. Several gung-ho members of the Coast Guard auxiliary plied us with facts—as late as 1960 the island had neither electricity nor plumbing, which is to say that as *Sputnik* was circling the earth, the keeper of Boston Light was reading at night by a kerosene lamp—and organized us into quasi-platoons.

There was a whiff of military stricture in the air, but the astonishment was that we were being allowed inside this old lighthouse at all, and welcomed up a winding stair into the tiny, narrow lens room to stand around *but not touch* an immensely rare optical device called a second order Fresnel lens. Made in France in the middle of the nineteenth

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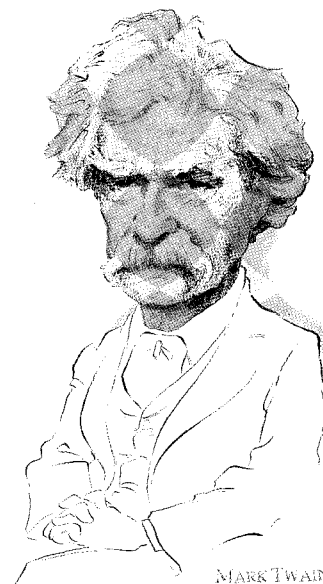
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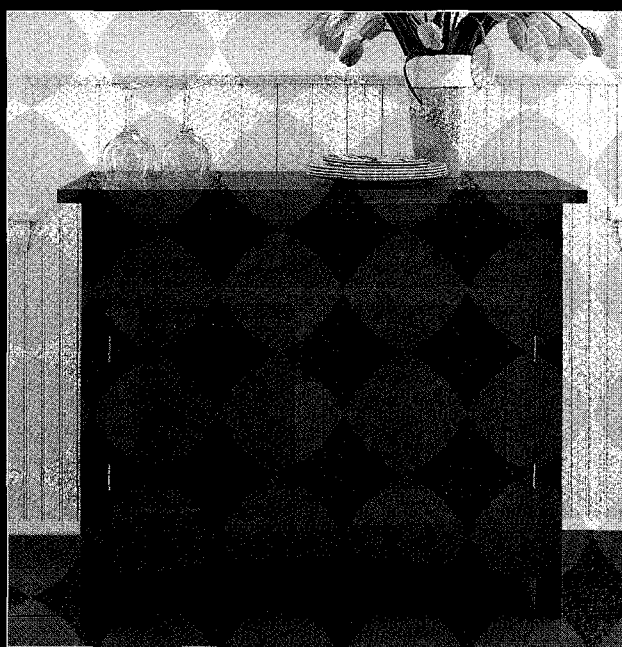


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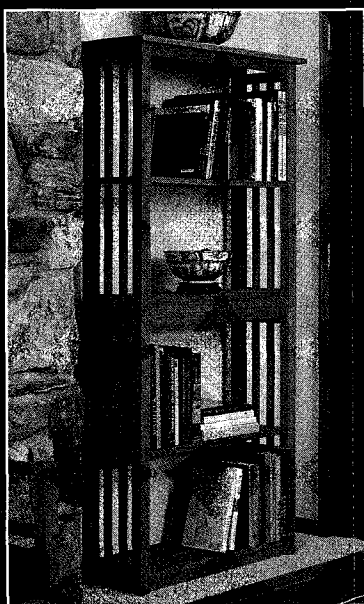


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century, the lens is a handsome thing, roughly the shape of a pagoda, of thick glass, with many flaring ridges that focus light onto round disks in the center of each lens panel. Rainbow bits of the spectrum colored our faces as we studied its 336 prisms that focus and intensify the light from a 1,000-watt lamp into a two-million-candlepower beam. How strong is that? It can be seen for twenty-seven miles, and if it were improperly angled during cleaning, it would ignite brush fires on shore. This elegant, powerful artifact would be hard, perhaps impossible, to duplicate. Sadly, the Fresnel manufactory did not survive World War II; also lost were the plans and formulas for the lens glass. Anyway, technology has moved on; newer light-houses are fitted with high-intensity bulbs like those on airport runways. Gazing seaward from the lens room, we could see the hummock of Cape Cod. It was a beautiful day, clear and cloudless, but all local mariners have seen such fair weather vanish in sudden, unpredicted fog banks or violent squalls. From this tiny room issues what is under such foul conditions one of the most priceless words in the navigational language written across the seas.

My admiration for the burly pinions of modern civilization coexists with deep reservations about some of the logic that drives our industrial world. For example, as I roamed the construction site for Boston's new Central Artery and tunnel, I was agog. As every local knows well, the Big Dig is the largest, most complex engineering project in American history. It is one jaw-dropping engineering feat after another, requiring constant improvisation because the construction is located smack in the midst of the old transportation corridor—which continues in full operation. Likened to performing open-heart surgery on a marathoner during a race, the project is the sort of enterprise for which we might wish we had reserved the word "awesome"—once the boss word of the Romantic Sublime, now hanging out with "dude." Moreover, one of the first things I noticed was how many women are working construction at the Big Dig, how totally awesome they

looked lugging cables and acetylene torches, and how happy they all appeared. I can't remember seeing so many women in one place looking so happy. They looked almost smug, like new mothers. I'm not making this up.

And yet this enterprise, whose praises I sing, is a \$14 billion—and counting—*highway* project that has tragically missed many golden opportunities to include urban public-transit upgrades. The project will deliver some vital communications lines and open space, but only fierce pressure from citizens' groups has brought a few transit felicities to the urban core. I'm for fewer cars and less oil, and no wars for oil. I'm for more trains (with their transporting names) and no vast dams that wipe out ancient villages and salmon routes. And still I cherish the promise of *techné*, the promise of human ingenuity, which is in such evidence at the Big Dig. If you go, check out the casting basins, and the jack-tunneling operation. Unbelievable.

When we were very young, and full-time disciples of Nancy Drew, my best friend, Ellen Jane, and I spent a lot of time trying to figure out the adult world. There were many things for which we did not yet have language. One summer afternoon when we were six or seven, Ellen Jane and I lay on the grass in her back yard trying to find a word for the hundreds of enormous, tall, lacy, flared steel things that strode for miles over the hills and valleys of eastern Tennessee. "Giants," I suggested—for the size of the structures. Ellen Jane said, "Ladies' slips"—for their shape. Giants or ladies' slips—those were our best guesses for the ten-story electrical pylons of the TVA that were changing the face of the upper South. And looking back, I have to say those were very good guesses. Between the two of us, Ellen Jane and I mythologized and domesticated the vast new TVA system, and in doing so we got something exactly right. Human infrastructure is at once heroic and ordinary, gigantic and intimate, always a membrane between the great and the small, the collective and the personal, between things as close as our skin and as remote as the distant future. ▀



GARDENS

LIQUID REFRESHMENT

Ponds and other water features can be lovely—or they can be stinking, murky eyesores. A primer on what makes the difference

BY STEPHEN BUDIANSKY

.....

I have always been a firm believer in taking a bold approach to gardening, sort of a horticultural equivalent to what the military calls reconnaissance-by-fire: just get out there, blast away, and see what happens. This is generally both instructive and fun. Occasionally it produces astonishing successes, such as the four diminutive but irrefutable artichokes I managed to eke out of my sultry Virginia garden last summer.

Gardening is as much art and craft

as it is science, and there is so much that has to be adapted through individual experience to individual climate, soil, tools, temperament, and tolerance for tedium that studying handbooks and following expert advice can take a person only so far in any case. The failures that come from just getting out there and trying something are no worse than any other failures one faces when confronting the notoriously fickle gods of agriculture.

That is what I thought, at least, until I tried water gardening and a fine late-winter day earlier this year found me, shin-deep, bailing out 200 gallons of something that smelled like a cross between pond scum and an open sewer. It smelled that way mainly because, technically speaking, that's what it was. Floating in the murk was one semi-intact dead goldfish; at the very bottom was a forlorn fish skeleton that reminded me of old Sylvester the Cat cartoons. The rest of the many fish that had been there last summer, before things went really bad, had vanished without a trace. By the time I was finished bailing it all out, my hands were dyed algae-green, a vivid color that came off only after five vigorous scrubblings. The odor was not so easily eradicated. And thus ended my just-get-out-there-and-do-something attempt at "natural" water gardening.

The idea of a garden pond dotted with lily pads and colorful fish, alive at night with the chirping of frogs, has proved irresistibly alluring to a growing number of home gardeners in recent years—and understandably so. Richard Koogler, of Lilypons Water Gardens, a major supplier of equipment and accessories, says that business has grown about 20 percent a year for most of the past fifteen years. He attributes this growth in large part to the availability of inexpensive, durable, and convenient rubber or PVC pond liners, which have taken the place of expensive and difficult concrete. A typical backyard do-it-yourself water garden, he says, costs \$500 to \$1,000.

When I jumped on the bandwagon, a few summers back, I found it quite easy to dig out a small pond in the center of my formal garden; install the flexible liner; add a few goldfish, snails, and water lilies in pots; and stand back and let 'er rip. The fish spawned with remarkable celerity, the lilies blossomed, and a variety of wild animal life showed up in no time: dragonflies, frogs, even a turtle. It was a lovely, dynamic centerpiece to the staid square lawn and boxwoods, and part of the pleasure was that it really did seem to be a complete ecosystem in miniature, with its own internal rhythms and sense of purpose.

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In their sales literature the purveyors of water-garden supplies take a wonderfully inconsistent attitude toward what's involved in making a garden pond work. On the one hand, they make it sound like a snap. On the other hand, they prominently advertise a frightening armamentarium—electric pumps, biological and mechanical filters, UV sterilizers, chemical disinfectants, underwater vacuum cleaners, skimmers, algicides, and a vast pharmacopoeia for fish—that strongly hints at disasters awaiting anyone not equipped with everything modern technology has to offer. The idea of running a high-tech outdoor aquarium did not appeal to me; neither did turning my garden into some sort of water extravaganza, with jetting fountains, waterfalls, and, who knows, colored lights and mood music. Much of the “it’s a snap” advice, though, suggested that a water garden, even a small one, could be made to function as a balanced and natural ecosystem without all these gizmos. That sounded like the ticket.

Things worked well until last summer, when the water in my pond started turning darker and darker, first green and then brown. Fish sightings became rarer and finally ceased altogether. I admit that I was guilty of gross wishful thinking (“The fish are probably just hiding”; “It will clear up by itself”). I finally faced reality on that late-winter day. If this was an ecosystem in miniature, it was now a dead ecosystem in miniature. And so I bailed, and prepared to begin anew. The question I wanted answered before I started again was whether a water garden really can be self-regulating, or whether that is just propaganda aimed at the lazy and gullible. I still didn’t want to install pumps and filters, with their noise and plumbing and wiring. But I knew that even big-time zoologists and botanists who try to re-create balanced ecosystems on a large scale usually have to mess around with them constantly to keep things from going haywire. Furthermore, I have seen plenty of perfectly natural small ponds out there in the perfectly natural world covered with perfectly natural pond scum, and reeking.

Michael Masser is an expert on aquaculture and the ecology of ponds; he is an associate professor at Texas A&M

University and a fisheries specialist who advises both commercial fish growers and amateur water gardeners. When I phoned him, not long ago, the first thing he told me was that although many of the key ecological cycles found in nature can indeed be reproduced in a small garden pond, such ponds differ from real ones in important ways. Natural biological and chemical processes can operate even in a rain barrel, but by themselves they generally won’t carry the burden of keeping things in balance. In a small water garden it’s more likely that they will have to be tricked into doing the dirty work.

One big difference between most real ponds and most garden ponds is the density of fish. Even a few small goldfish in a several-hundred-gallon water garden result in a huge injection of nutrients, especially when the fish are fed pellets or other food beyond what they would forage, thereby increasing their natural output. “The fish are excreting nitrogen and phosphorus, the same ingredients in fertilizer,” Masser explained. The growth of microscopic algae that float is held in check in most ponds only by the limited availability of these nutrients, which all plants require for growth. Masser said, “People tend to overstock with fish and tend to overfeed the fish they have. And then they get all bent out of shape about green water.”

A second big difference between gardens and the real world is that real ponds do a much better job of tying up phosphorus. In a real pond most of the phosphorus compounds contained in fish and other animal droppings bind chemically with the soil at the bottom of the pond, and then are slowly recycled by rooted underwater plants or processed by microbes before the algae ever get to them. Garden ponds built with artificial liners don’t have a soil layer to perform this essential filtering chore. (And given that the water gardener should clean accumulated debris off the bottom every few years, it’s generally not practical to cover the liner with a thick layer of soil.)

When the excess nutrients end up in solution, they fuel an explosive growth in algae. Single-celled algae can multiply at an astronomical rate, so they respond far more quickly to an injection of nitrogen and phosphorus than do vascular

plants. If things get really bad, eutrophication ensues: the algae use up so much oxygen from the water for metabolism—especially at night, when photosynthesis is not occurring to replenish the oxygen supply—that the fish and other organisms start to choke and die. Decay microorganisms then undergo a burst of metabolic activity to decompose all that rotting stuff, and they in turn start rapidly depleting what's left of the pond's oxygen supply. When all the oxygen is gone, the rotten stuff stops breaking down and starts stinking. This was apparently the fate of my water garden.

When the water-garden suppliers are in their don't-worry-be-happy mode, they assure us that fish keep algae in check by eating them—which sounds like the perfect cycle of balance: what the fish sow, they reap. The trouble, Masser says, is that they don't. Some species of fish may eat a bit of the long, filamentous algae that grow in some ponds, but fish don't eat the microscopic algae that make the real trouble. Suppliers also often promote snails as a natural means of controlling algae, but Masser is skeptical that they do very much either. Worse, he says, the snails sold to water gardeners are invariably non-native species, and several species have already gotten loose and caused serious problems. A notorious troublemaker in the southern United States and Hawaii is the apple snail. What do apple snails do? I asked. "They get huge and eat everything they want to," Masser told me. How huge? "As big as your fist." Apple snails are apparently a particular menace in rice paddies.

Beyond reducing the number of fish, feeding them less, and tolerating a bit of green murkiness in the water, the best bet, Masser says, is to "overwhelm" the natural nitrogen cycle in the pond so that it cannot end up fueling algae growth. One way to do this is to have plenty of rooted plants in submerged pots, so that nitrogen from fish waste is quickly taken up. Rooted underwater plants also oxygenate the water, helping to counteract any tendency toward eutrophication. Making sure that a water garden is inoculated with naturally occurring bacteria that will process nitrogen and decompose organic matter helps to ensure that these key parts of the nitrogen cycle are operat-

ing; a bucket of (real) pond water will do the trick. The nitrogen from fish waste is mostly ammonia, which is highly soluble and thus readily available to the floating algae. Ammonia is also toxic to fish. The bacteria do the good deed of converting ammonia to less soluble compounds such as nitrates and nitrites, and even to nitrogen gas, which exits the system altogether.

Another less than perfectly natural compromise is to blanket the water with floating plants, keeping at least 80 percent of the surface area covered at all times. The idea is not only to create competition for the nutrients but also to block out sunlight. That's cheating in a way, and not many real ponds look like this, but it is a way to manipulate and harness natural energy and nutrient flows to achieve the desired end.

If worse comes to worst, there is filtration. Apparently, if you want to keep koi, those large, flashy fish that are the essence of Japanese water gardens, you're pretty much stuck running your pond like an aquarium, because koi are extremely messy and like to root around in the plants, stirring up dirt and detritus, which hopelessly clouds the water absent mechanical pumps and filters. The least bothersome form of filtration is biofiltration, which gives the nitrogen cycle a boost by pumping the pond water through a medium that harbors nitrifying bacteria; the resulting nitrites and nitrates get left behind in the filter, and the clean water is returned to the pond.

The lesson in all of this, I concluded, is that water gardeners need to think of natural processes as a tool to be manipulated and exploited, not an end in themselves. There is too much that's artificial about a water garden, especially a small one, to expect it to maintain a state of equilibrium without some firm guidance. I had shied away from introducing floating plants—non-native tropics such as water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*) and water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), which are actually illegal in some parts of the country because of their invasive habits and which in any case look more as if they belong on the Amazon than in a "natural" Virginia pond. But I'm beginning to think they look a lot more natural than fish skeletons or electric pumps and tubes running every which way. **A**

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FIELD OF TIN

A rediscovered baseball toy gets a retired player back in the game

BY WILLIAM ZINSSER

.....

The other day a man named Bill Lehren came to my office in Manhattan, carrying a large package carefully tied with string. He had called to tell me what he wanted to show me, and I could hardly wait for him to get it unwrapped. He put the package on my desk and went to work, tugging at the knots and removing the paper with slow and almost liturgical motions. Finally the object was revealed: the mechanical baseball game that consumed thousands of hours of my boyhood. I hadn't seen one in more than sixty years.

Bill Lehren's visit closed a circle that had opened on April 6, 1983, when an article I wrote about that game ran in *The New York Times*. Video games were then a new craze, and there was much ululation in the land about how America's young people were squandering their youth in video arcades. I wanted to point out that my own boyhood addiction to this mechanical baseball game had been no less obsessive and that it didn't seem to have ruined me.

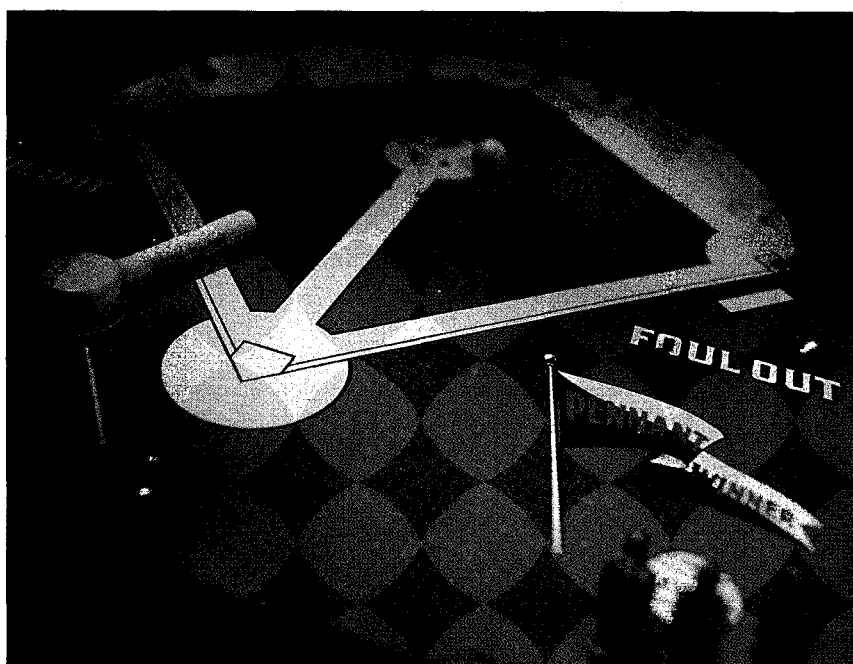
For a boy growing up in the 1930s, I explained, it wasn't easy to gratify a craving for baseball. Television didn't exist, and games on the radio were scarce. Board games tried to cater to the need, but they were dismal products, dependent on some numerical indicator—dice or cards or the spin of a wheel—to determine what was happening on the "field." They didn't convey any sense of the real game, and they didn't even require skill.

Then, one year, I found under the Christmas tree a baseball game that looked and acted like a baseball game. The field was a sheet of green-painted tin, roughly two feet square, enclosed by a low wooden fence. The nine defensive players—little cast-iron men—stood at their positions around the diamond. In front of every player was an indented round pocket. If a ball was hit to a player, it would bounce off him into the pocket for an out. Otherwise it

would roll to a part of the field designated "foul," "single," "double," "triple," or "home run."

The bat was powered by a tightly coiled spring. When it was released, it swung fiercely across the plate. The boy who was the batter, kneeling behind home plate, held the bat back, waiting for the pitch. The boy who was the pitcher, kneeling at the opposite end,

There was no question of my not taking enough time—the game altered the whole concept of leisure for me and my friend Charlie Willis. Nor did it occur to us to play as individuals; Charlie was the New York Yankees, and I was the Detroit Tigers. Thus was born one of the longest rivalries in mechanical sport. Summers turned to winters and then to other summers, and still the series went on. Mountains of paper—box scores, batting averages, team statistics—joined the big-league gum cards and old issues of *Baseball Magazine* in the rising litter of my room. I still remember one day when Charlie and I played twenty-two consecutive games.



WALTER SWALLING

kept his fingers on two buttons, one on each side, which controlled the pitches. By pressing them in various ways he could pitch a fast ball, a slow ball, or one of several intermediate speeds.

Thus the classic duel between batter and pitcher was preserved with all its rewards and indignities. The batter, anticipating a fast ball, would release the bat before a slow ball arrived. Or, expecting a slow ball, he would hold the bat back and watch the ball shoot past him into the catcher's pocket. But the batter might also guess correctly. That this battle of wits could be replicated in a child's toy struck me as a marvel of invention.

The game gave itself to those who took time to get in tune with its soul.

"I sometimes wonder what became of my game," I wrote at the end of my article.

My mother must have thrown it away when I went into the army, assuming I would never want to play it again. I never saw the game in any other boy's home, and I've never seen it at any of those antique shows that sell old mechanical banks and toys. I can't recall who made the game or what it was called. But in the mists of memory I see the word WOLVERINE. What "Rosebud" was to Citizen Kane, "Wolverine" is to me—a clue almost irrecoverably faint. I mention it in case anyone finds the game in an attic or a basement or a garage. I can be there on the next plane—and so can Charlie Willis.

It took only a few days for the letters to start trickling in. "Destiny must have been guiding my actions yesterday as I went to pick up my *Philadelphia Inquirer*," wrote L. Robert Feitig, of Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.

I've always been a staunch baseball fan, and each day I must read the *Inquirer* to see how my beloved Phillies made out. As fate would dictate, the newsstand was out of the *Inquirer*, so I purchased a *New York Times*, something I rarely do. Whatever dictated that I should peruse the Living section, and especially page 8, I will never know, but there before my eyes was your article.

I was astounded. I, too, spent many hours on the floor, playing that game with my boyhood chum, Jim Sutch. I still have the game, and have played it with two more generations, my son, John, and now my three grandsons. They are still rather young, and as a result they have trouble hitting the fast ball and complain when I shoot it past them, but they will soon learn how to hit it.

The name and maker of the game were provided by J. M. Pittman, of North Bellmore, New York. He wrote,

You will be pleased to know that at least one of Wolverine Supply & Manufacturing Company's "Pennant Winner" baseball games still exists. My brother and I received our game at Christmas, 1932. It was purchased from the old Frederick Loeser store in Brooklyn. We organized leagues and had pennant winners, an All-Star game each season, and of course a World Series. My notebooks contain line scores and averages and statistics of more than 1,000 games. There are records of pitching duels between Lefty Grove and Carl Hubbell, Dizzy Dean and Lon Warneke, as well as games broken up by the bats of Jimmy Foxx, Al Simmons, Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth.

Fredric Kolb, of Bernardsville, New Jersey, wrote,

I also went through the experiences you describe, especially all those board games with spinner and dice. Then, in 1929, my dad purchased the Wolverine baseball game at A. G. Spalding in New York. It cost \$15, which was a vast sum in those days. I started a league with three other boys, and one of them produced a newspaper each Saturday with reports and averages of all our games.

That first year I won the league championship on the final day of the season. The other boys soon realized my "home field" advantage, and two of them received games of their own the next Christmas. As time went on, each of them began to "doctor" his game by adjusting the pitching springs, bat tension, etc., to his own advantage. How much like the real game!

That verisimilitude was also recalled by George Culver, of Massapequa, New York, who wrote,

Just as for you, that game completely captivated me back in 1936 or thereabouts. The amazing thing was that the inventor was able to keep the hits (extra-base hits as well as singles) and the scores to just about what you'd expect in a real, professionally played game.

The largest league was reported by Lou Sanders, of Mineola, New York. He wrote,

In my neighborhood there were twelve fellows, each one representing a major league team and each player keeping his own lineup and batting statistics and win/loss records. I was the 1937 Giants.

Two mothers, like mine, figured in speculation about the disposal of the game. "I, too, had the game you describe," wrote Ian G. MacDonald, of Beacon, New York. "It may be hidden somewhere in my mother's attic" After sealing his letter, MacDonald added a postscript on the envelope: "I just found the game in my mother's house. It was missing the men, but I think they're probably hidden in a 'safe place.' A 'safe place' in my mother's house is equivalent to a black hole."

Frank E. Darnulc, of Suffern, New York, wrote,

I also was the happy owner of that game, and I regret that I didn't keep it. My mother was great on getting rid of things not used every day, and I suppose the game went down the dumbwaiter.

The last letter was postmarked Booneville, Arkansas, and I could hardly believe the name on the envelope: Wolverine Toy Company. It was from William W. Lehren, the vice-president of sales. He wrote,



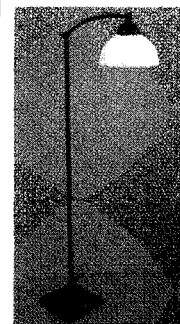
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By the time I reached the third paragraph of your article, I couldn't help thinking, "If only he had seen our Pennant Winner baseball game." I was covered with gooseflesh as I read the remainder of the piece.

Wolverine is a medium-sized toy manufacturer with a low profile. We made the Pennant Winner from 1929 to 1950. When I joined the company in 1948 it was considered a rather high-priced carriage-trade item. Anyone who liked baseball loved this game, but unfortunately it required demonstration, and the product was dropped. After reading your article we dug around in our museum and found that we had one game in our inventory. Needless to say, it will not be allowed off the premises. However, if you or Charlie Willis ever happen to be wandering around the South, I'd love to take you on for a few games.

That was the same game that the same Bill Lehren had just unwrapped in my office; he had bought it from the company when he retired and moved back home to Connecticut. He told me that Wolverine was founded in 1903, in Pittsburgh, by Benjamin Franklin Bain, a die maker and metal fabricator from Michigan, who named his company for the University of Michigan football team. The business thrived by making products such as pie tins and stovetop toasters for America's kitchens.

Around 1910 Bain was asked to make dies for a gravity-action toy to be called Sandy Andy. It consisted of a cart that was pulled by a counterweight to the top of an incline, where it received a load of sand from a hopper. Its weight then took it back down, and it dumped its load. After Bain's dies were made, the inventor went broke. Bain decided he might as well go ahead and manufacture Sandy Andy in his own factory—a decision that would result in one of the most enduring American toys. Wolverine made Sandy Andy well into the 1950s and even sold a box of sand to go with it—an accessory that parents may not have appreciated having around the house.

In 1914 Bill Lehren's father, James Lehren, a young immigrant from Holland, got part-time work as a demonstrator of Sandy Andy at Gimbel's department store, in New York. He did so well that he was hired by the

company to come to Pittsburgh as its only salesman. After Bain died, the company faltered and was near collapse in 1928, when James Lehren took over as president. He steered Wolverine through the Depression and World War II, when the factory was converted to making military equipment.

"I joined Wolverine as a salesman and became vice-president in the mid-1960s," Bill Lehren told me. "At that time it was called the Wolverine Toy Company. In 1968 it was sold to a private conglomerate and moved to Booneville, Arkansas. I remember that we shipped a whole bargeload of punch presses and other metalworking machinery there from Pittsburgh—down the Ohio and the Mississippi and up the Arkansas River. Later the woman who was president of Wolverine decided it was improper for a toy company to be named for such a vicious animal and changed it to Today's Kids. Of course, they're completely out of metal now. Today everything is plastic."

As for who invented the Pennant Winner, nobody seems to know. Obviously the inventor was both a baseball nut and a mechanical genius. Possibly he worked for Wolverine. More probably—in the grand tradition of industrial America—he was a lone tinkerer who took his patent to Wolverine around 1928. Just how skillfully the company realized that inventor's dream I was now reminded as Bill Lehren placed the game on my desk. It was a thing of beauty, its shiny metal field in perfect condition, without a dent or a scratch.

Lehren unwrapped the nine blue defensive players and put them in their slots. (The three base runners were red.) Then he unwrapped the ball and placed it against the pitching prong. I could still feel in my fingertips the fast and slow buttons that controlled that ball. I could also still feel the bat as I used to hold it back, waiting for the pitch, trying not to release it too soon or too late. Two fingers were best—one was too weak, three lacked finesse.

"Do you want to play a game?" Lehren asked me. Of course I did. We took our positions on opposite sides of my desk and tried a few practice pitches

and swings. But something was wrong—the ball rolled just a little unevenly. There was only one thing to do, and we both knew it. Lehren lifted the game down onto the rug.

The office where I write is in a commercial building on Lexington Avenue. I rent space along with other freelancers, in fields such as advertising and fashion and graphic design. I've never closed my door, and I wasn't going to start now. Anyone who happened to pass my office that afternoon would have seen two men in their seventies down on all fours—not an everyday spectacle in the American workplace.

Lehren batted first, and I positioned my fingers against the two control buttons. He said he was ready, and I fired a fast ball. The bat swung and the ball shot into the outfield, beyond the center fielder and into the slot marked "home run." I tried a slow ball. *Boom!* Another home run. I tried to mix my pitches. They all came rocketing back: double, triple, home run. Finally a ball landed in the pocket in front of the left fielder with a satisfying *plonk*. One out. But it was a disastrous start. The decades had left their residue of rust.

After two more outs we switched sides. As I held the bat back, I felt as if my brain and my two fingertips were in perfect neurological rapport. Suddenly I heard the familiar click of the pitching prong being released and the equally familiar *thomp* of the ball in the catcher's metal pocket. I hardly saw it go by. Priming myself for another fast pitch, I released the bat quickly and saw the ball dawdle toward the plate. The moment had lost none of its ignominy.

That was a bad inning. But then the old reflexes began to return, and we settled into a game that stayed close, obedient to the odds and probabilities of real baseball. Outside, the sun went down and the sky over Manhattan turned dark. We didn't notice; we were twelve-year-old boys again, getting up and down from the rug every few minutes to change sides. Finally Lehren said he had to catch his train back to the suburbs, and he packed up the game.

When we said good-bye at the elevator, I had one last question for him: "Can you come back tomorrow?" ▀

SAUSAGES, SOUSE, AND SHANDYBOOKERS

A visit with a woman whose life is butchering

BY CORBY KUMMER

.....

Dietrich's Meats & Country Store is in Krumsville, just off a main highway that runs through Pennsylvania Dutch country. I drove there from Philadelphia early this past spring with Don Yoder, a retired University of Pennsylvania professor who helped to establish the study of "folklife" in the United States (he is an authority on

all things Pennsylvania Dutch). As we passed through lovely, fertile farmland, Yoder pointed out real and ersatz hex symbols painted on the sides of beautiful stone barns. The signs, he said, were favored only by certain sects using a narrow range of motifs, and only for decoration; the concept of warding off evil spirits and the name

"hex" were imposed only in this century, by wrongheaded journalists and folklorists, and nowadays any barn owner picks any old symbol regardless of tradition. The extensive Yoder clan figures prominently in local history, and we admired several handsome Yoder homesteads on our way.

Dietrich's is large and modern, with many kinds of locally made hard pretzels in racks near the door, and a glass case full of fresh meats and sausages running the length of the back wall. Jars of apple butter, home-fermented sauerkraut, and various pickled meats cover the counter, and beside the cash register are homemade crumb-topped shoofly pies, marbled "funny cakes," domed yeast breads, and lemon-meringue pies. I immediately wanted to open a bag of pretzels or cut a slice of pie, but I had come for meat.

My visit was prompted by the recent surge of bad news in Europe: the mad-cow disease resulting from feeding ground-up animal parts to ruminants, and the foot-and-mouth outbreaks that caused the terrible precautionary destruction of hundreds of thousands of seemingly healthy animals. I wanted to see farming and butchering practices in this country while they remain unthreatened, in a community where they have managed to survive little changed.

For years William Woys Weaver, a food historian and writer and a researcher of heirloom herbs and vegetables in his native Pennsylvania Dutch territory, had urged me to visit a woman whose "life is butchering" and who lives near Kutztown, the home of a famous annual summer festival. Verna Dietrich, Weaver said, was the real thing—descended from a long line of Pennsylvania Dutch farmers, and the mistress of a wealth of traditional cuts and preparations. Weaver arranged for his longtime mentor, Yoder, who had helped to establish the Kutztown festival long before it turned to "kountry kitsch" (as Weaver put it), to be my guide. Little did I know quite how real Dietrich would be—or quite how hard I would fall for her Lebanon bologna.



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"Huge in size and opinions," Weaver had called Dietrich, and anyone entering the store could verify his description. Her wide ringleted head bobs behind the counter, and her large aproned form comes into view when she emerges to find an item for a customer. During the several hours we spoke (she feeding me a steady stream of samples and instructing me on how to increase sales of *The Atlantic* by running a free full-page ad promoting her smoked birds), she never stopped surveying the store and making sure the customers either found what they wanted or wanted something.

Dietrich told me that she had grown up on a dairy farm in Virginville, a town nine miles south of Krumsville. All the recipes for the ninety or so meat products she now stocks, she claimed, came from her own family, chiefly from a grandmother with whom she lived for ten years of her childhood. Her husband, Willard, helped by one of their three sons, Glenn, raises enough pigs, lambs, and cattle to supply the store—quite a lot of animals, given that Dietrich's is open seven days a week; operates a booth every Friday and Saturday at Renninger's farmers' market, in Kutztown; and does an extensive mail-order business. Every Tuesday, Dietrich said, the family slaughters about twenty pigs, three or four lambs, and four or five cattle. Marlin, another son, was in the store (his wife, Dawn, helps keep the books); he occasionally joined the conversation on his way into or out of the meat-cutting and sausage-making room, which, I could see through the window of a swinging door, was as big as the sales area. I was not invited in. I did enter the kitchen, however, and was nearly overwhelmed by the smell of a deep kettle of hot lard, in which Debbie Dietrich, another daughter-in-law, was frying *fastnachts*—square Lenten doughnuts made from a yeast dough containing mashed potatoes, butter, and lard.

"You won't find many places that slaughter their own pork, beef, and lambs and do their own processing," Verna Dietrich said. "We make everything here." She didn't stop for breath as she recited her products like a country auctioneer, keeping an eye on the

customers and occasionally addressing them midstream: "Corn beef fresh and smoked, fresh and smoked sausage, Lebanon and sweet bologna, German mince bologna, ducks, geese, pheasant, quail, chukar (that's partridge), guinea hens, goat, lamb, smoked ducks, turkeys, capons, rabbits—we raise our own rabbits. Can I help you? We have everything head to tail—brains and sweetbreads, oxtail, hearts, tongues, kidneys. We can our own tripe, pig's feet, and souse. We cure our own Westphalian hams, old-fashioned farmers' and mild-cured ham, double-smoked bacon and regular hickory-smoked, beef bacon, Canadian bacon, beef jerky, slim jims hot, mild, or sweet, hot dogs, and German wieners. Yoder, what do you want there? Bratwurst and veal bratwurst, knackwurst, ring bolognas—they're all beef, you eat them for a snack like kielbasa—and cheese ring bologna with pieces of cheese that melt when you cook it, and a full line of German products like mettwurst and jagdwurst. Are you looking for anything special?"

While serving customers Dietrich would slip Yoder and me little tastes of products other than the copious array of salamis and sausages already set out in tiny cubes: liverwurst, for instance, something I hadn't thought of since it meant grade-school sandwiches no one could trade, and so good that I wanted to spread it on German rye bread; and a kind of salami I'd never had that is emblematic of the Pennsylvania Dutch larder—Lebanon bologna, named for the county where it was first commercially produced. What makes it typical is the use of beef rather than pork, a distinct sweetness, and a gentle spicing with hints of ginger, paprika, mustard, and mace. (I got this list from *Hot Links and Country Flavors*, by the master sausage maker Bruce Aidells with Denis Kelly; Dietrich would reveal few of her "seasonings.") The Lebanon bologna, unlike other things I tasted at the store, was subtly smoked and not particularly salty.

Dietrich diverted me from my steady progress through several slices of it by handing across the counter a thin slice of what looked like head

cheese, spread with mayonnaise—"dressing," she called it—above and ballpark mustard below. Yoder asked what it was. "Just eat it," she said with a sly smile I had already learned to recognize. (The smile is visible in a photograph Weaver took and included in his *Pennsylvania Dutch Country Cooking*, in which Dietrich is nearly cuddling two hanging hog carcasses just a bit larger than she is.) It grew broader as we kept chewing the mild-flavored and very gelatinous slice ("No Knox gelatin in it!"). When she had taken sufficient pleasure in our puzzlement, she said, "Pig snout."

Knowing that I wanted to see how animals were raised locally, Yoder took me to visit a nearby pig and beef farm owned by Old Order Mennonites to whom Weaver, a sixteenth-generation Quaker with many Mennonite forebears, is distantly related. "They don't look it," Weaver had remarked in an e-mail, "but they are horse-and-buggy millionaires."

He was right about their modesty. The large family—a couple with twelve children and numerous grandchildren, most of them living on the farm—had equipped their houses with both electricity and a telephone but otherwise lived very simply (and very much in the manner of the farm families of my Connecticut childhood). The greenhouses where they raised flowers and tomato plants to sell at their large roadside stand had high-technology heaters, but the barns were very low-technology and not, in fact, notably clean. The pigs and cattle were raised solely for meat, the family matriarch—a white-haired woman with a radiant complexion who was wearing traditional dress—explained as she led Yoder and me along muddy paths, with several grandchildren, just home from school, trailing behind.

Heirloom breeds are of little interest to the family. The cattle, her husband told us when he joined us, are Holsteins, which the family buys at six months and feeds with corn from their farm to "finish" for twelve to eighteen months before selling them to a slaughterhouse. Pigs are the farm's

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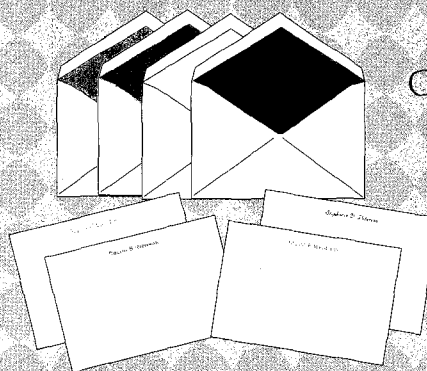
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main business: one barn is set aside as a nursery. Like the cattle and the family's chickens, the pigs are fed principally on corn and are given antibiotics only when an outbreak of disease occurs—which, the farmer said, hasn't happened in years. The family owns numerous farms; it has never bought "flour" feed of the kind that can include animal by-products, he told us. The idea seemed as unnatural to him (and to Dietrich, who bridled when I brought up the subject) as it does to consumers who wonder at the origin and spread of mad-cow disease.

Dietrich doesn't sell her fresh cuts by mail, but she does ship every kind of sausage she makes, including the irresistible Lebanon bologna. Her plain fresh sausage—a mixture of beef and pork and very few spices (the only one she would name was coriander)—is another typical Pennsylvania Dutch product. I asked for ways

gave them from their garden. It smelled so good." She swallowed as she remembered the dish, a one-pot supper that also included eggs. "If you're brought up with it," she said, "you like it and you get hungry for it."

Weaver later told me that Dietrich's rustic shandybookers was a variant of a traditional Pennsylvania "chopped" omelet called *dummes*, in which potatoes or diced bread and perhaps a bit of meat are sautéed with just enough beaten egg to hold them together. "Shandy" is probably a variant of "shanty," Yoder said, and "booker" is an example of the Pennsylvania Dutch penchant for *spott*, or joke, names.

I've adapted a recipe for shandybookers—using cooking instructions that Dietrich gave Yoder and me, and ingredient quantities from a chopped-omelet recipe in Weaver's book.

To serve six people, peel and chop two cups of onion, and scrub and cut into small dice one and a half pounds

Verna Dietrich recited her products like a country auctioneer while making sure her customers either found what they wanted or wanted something.

to prepare it. "Well, you can make shandybookers," she said, another sly smile beginning to appear. Yoder took out his notebook.

"Years ago," Dietrich began, "tramps would come to our door and ask if they could dig the garden." Yoder explained that the men were colliers, mostly Welshmen, out of work from the nearby coal mines; he gave Dietrich the Pennsylvania Dutch word for "collier," and she nodded in agreement. The men would dig the family's garden in March, around Saint Patrick's Day, and when they put in radishes, "we got radishes like crazy."

Families would pay the men with bags of food, she said. "Maybe you gave them potatoes, or sausage if you'd just butchered." Walking home from church, "you could smell they were making supper in the woods," she told us. "They had worked somewhere and gotten some kind of meat and potatoes, and they fried onions and parsley someone

(about four cups) of unpeeled red or white boiling potatoes, preferably new. Remove from their casings enough sausages to yield about one and a half cups (about twelve ounces) of meat. Cook the meat over medium heat until it browns lightly and releases its fat. Transfer the meat to a bowl and remove all but a tablespoon of fat from the pan; reserve the extra fat. Sauté the onions over medium heat until they turn translucent and just begin to color. Add the potatoes with salt and pepper to taste, and sauté them, covered, until they soften, about twenty minutes; add more fat if necessary to prevent them from sticking. Stir in the meat and a cup of minced fresh flat-leaf parsley and sauté, uncovered, until the parsley wilts, about five minutes. Lightly beat six eggs and pour them over the mixture. Stirring gently, cook over low heat until the eggs set, being careful not to overcook them. The pieces of meat should "show

through, almost like nuts," Dietrich said.

The dish is equally good with Lebanon bologna, which is already cooked: cut twelve ounces into thin disks and add them with the parsley. In this case the cooking fat, Dietrich insists, should be "lard—none of that commercial stuff." She of course renders and sells her own, and sends it by mail order (the number is 610-756-6344; lard costs \$1.00 a pound and Lebanon bologna \$4.49 a pound plus shipping). You can use olive oil or even someone else's sausage, as long as you don't tell her. (Aidells.com sells an exemplary mild fresh pork sausage along with innovative poultry sausages such as chicken-and-apple and Thai turkey; the minimum order for the fresh "Italian" sausage is two three-pound packs, at \$60.95 including shipping.)

Another secret to be kept from Dietrich is a vegetarian way to sample Pennsylvania Dutch flavors and even to make shandybookers. Weaver gives in his book a Lenten recipe for "faux sausage" made with watercress or, preferably, purslane (a fleshy herb that grows wild throughout the country and has recently come into fashion with all things Mediterranean) and bound with bread crumbs and eggs. To make fifteen patties, enough for six or seven servings, combine one cup of minced purslane or watercress, one cup plus two tablespoons of bread crumbs, two tablespoons of currants, one tablespoon of ground ginger, and half a teaspoon each of salt and freshly ground pepper. Beat three eggs until light-colored, and stir them into the mixture. Mold into patties between two tablespoons dipped into cold water and sauté the patties in hot vegetable or olive oil until they are golden brown on both sides. To use these in shandybookers, add the patties at the point you would add Lebanon bologna, lightly breaking them into the cooked potatoes and onions.

With or without Dietrich's home-made sausage, shandybookers can give family and friends an authentic taste of Pennsylvania Dutch country—and a call to Dietrich's store to order fresh sausage will doubtless provide stories to serve with the dish. **A**

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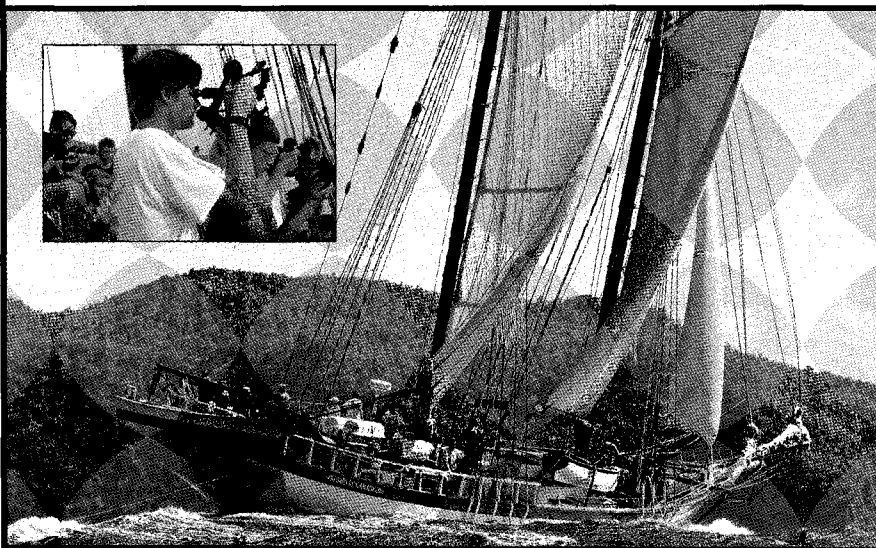
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BOOKS & CRITICS

BOOKS

TWO—MAKE THAT THREE—CHEERS FOR THE CHAIN BOOKSTORES

Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Books-A-Million have enormously enriched the nation's cultural life

BY BROOKE ALLEN

.....

What if fifteen years ago someone had suggested a nationwide network of gigantic bookshops, carrying about 150,000 titles each, staying open until 11:00 P.M. or midnight, and offering cafés, comfortable chairs, and public restrooms? And what if these sumptuous emporia were to be found

crystallized in the 1998 Nora Ephron film *You've Got Mail*, in which the cute encounter involves typically, and preposterously, antithetical types. The heroine, played by Meg Ryan, runs a venerable children's bookshop in Manhattan, a nurturing, warm-and-fuzzy, personal-services kind of place. The decidedly

tion of the retail book market being turned over to ever larger chain stores was alarming. *The Washington Post* expressed dismay: "Chain bookselling means that best-selling books will be available everywhere, usually at discounted prices, but it also means that they—and the tapes and the calendars—leave no room for the small-press edition of a minor novel, or a university press edition of an important scholarly work." The cultural elite continues to perceive the chains as purveyors of junk, and to emanate a rather surprising (if characteristic) aura of doom and gloom. Patricia Holt, a former book editor and reviewer for the *San Francisco*



not only in the great urban centers but also in small cities and suburbs all across the country—places like Plano, Texas; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Mesa, Arizona? Wouldn't we have thought that sounded like pure, if unattainable, heaven? Well, that is what the superstore chains—Barnes & Noble; Borders; and Books-A-Million, based in Birmingham, Alabama—have brought us. Why, then, the chorus of disapproval from the cultural elite? Why the characterization, spread by a vocal group of critics, of the chain bookstores as a sort of intellectual McDonald's, a symbol of the dumbing-down and standardization of American life?

The image of the big bad chains gobbling up brave little independents was

tainted hero, played by Tom Hanks, is the lowbrow owner of a chain of superstores intent on putting her out of business. (He bears a certain resemblance to Len Riggio, the brash CEO of Barnes & Noble.) At one point in the movie Ryan attacks Hanks's stores, saying they are "big, impersonal, overstocked, and full of ignorant salespeople." It's a clear cue for the audience to stand up and cheer.

The self-appointed guardians of educated America have tended to weigh in on Ephron's side. In 1986, with chain stores like B. Dalton and Waldenbooks dotted throughout America's malls and independent stores beginning to close down, the chains were perceived, with some justice, as soulless and inadequate, and the prospect of an ever larger por-

Chronicle, has been an especially angry critic; she writes a free twice-weekly e-mail column on the publishing industry, called "Holt Uncensored" (launched by the Northern California Independent Booksellers Association), one of whose purposes is to attack what she only half jokingly calls the "lying thieving" chains. André Schiffrin, the director of The New Press and formerly the managing director of Pantheon Books, recently based an entire book (*The Business of Books*) on his contention that the takeover of publishing and retail by big corporations and conglomerates, including the book superstores, has impoverished the culture, leaving "little room for books with new, controversial ideas or challenging literary voices."

ISTVAN BANYAI

One has to wonder just what planet he is on. A look around any of the superstores will show that more risky and experimental fiction, more first novels, and more serious nonfiction are available to general readers all over the country than ever before. During the 1990s, with insiders fearing that mainstream publishing houses would publish fewer “serious” books, it was thought that university presses would take up the slack, possibly at the expense of their more scholarly material. But that’s not exactly what has happened. The university presses are indeed publishing dramatically more titles that appeal to general readers—but a number of new houses, such as PublicAffairs, Encounter Books, and Schiffrin’s own New Press, and fledgling imprints like Theia (Hyperion) and BlueHen (Penguin Putnam) publish exclusively serious, noncommercial books, both nonfiction and fiction. Others, such as New York Review Books and A Common Reader, have made wonderful but out-of-print and often forgotten titles avail-

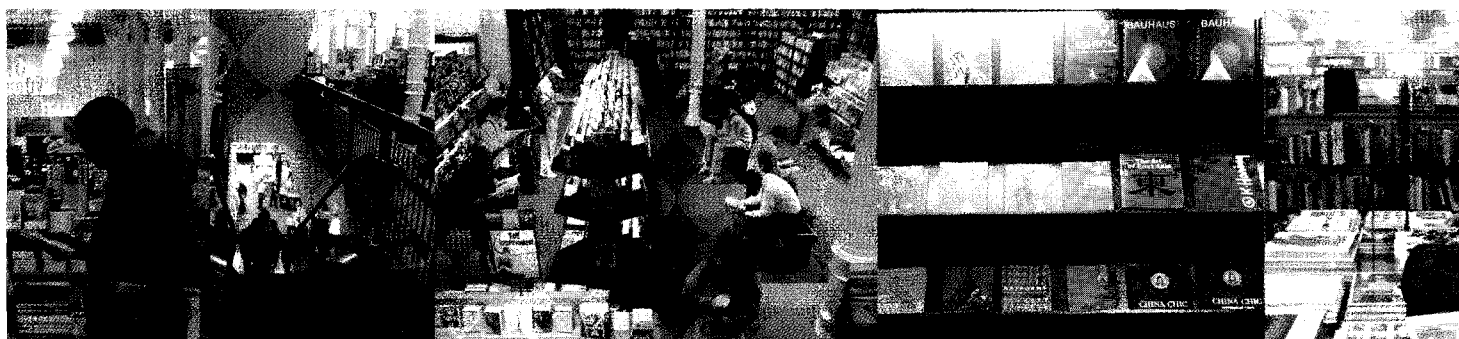
chains, which target a wider public and make the process of book buying unthreatening to the relatively less educated, the exclusivity factor disappears.

How do the chains hold up against the charges of the culture snobs? Let’s take Nora Ephron’s salvo first. Big and overstocked? To a real reader, the charge is absurd: there is no such thing as overstocked, and more is, quite simply, better. The superstores have given readers, writers, and publishers an invaluable gift: shelf room. The typical superstore carries about 150,000 titles in about 20,000 square feet of space, whereas the typical independent has room for fewer than 20,000 titles. *The Washington Post’s* fear that calendars and other impulse items would crowd out books has proved utterly groundless: Barnes & Noble, for example, orders about 85 percent of the more than 50,000 new adult trade titles published every year.

On a recent trip to the Barnes & Noble branch at Astor Place, in New

independents, I have come to the conclusion that the average chain salesperson is neither more nor less ignorant than his or her counterpart in the independents. One edge the independents do have is that if a salesperson is unhelpful or clueless, the more knowledgeable proprietor is often close at hand. But I have found that chain-store clerks are, on the whole, well-spoken and helpful, and sometimes know a lot more than one might expect.

In a syrupy scene in *You’ve Got Mail*, Meg Ryan lovingly introduces one of her child customers to Maud Hart Lovelace’s classic Betsy-Tacy series. Now, I am a Betsy-Tacy fan myself, as are my children, and only a few weeks before seeing the movie I had gone searching for some of the later books in the series. My first stop was Books of Wonder, the famous Manhattan children’s bookshop on which *You’ve Got Mail’s* independent appears to have been based. The clerk there had never heard of the series, and when she looked it up in *Books in Print*,



able again. Barnes & Noble sponsors a program called Discover, which promotes enough sensitive, gemlike first novels to choke a horse; Borders’s Original Voices program performs a similar service.

Although there is some reality in the image of the chains as predators (ours is a capitalist economy, after all), it is not the whole truth or even, perhaps, the most important part. The emotional drive behind the anti-chain crusade is an understandable mistrust of big corporations allied with the knee-jerk snobbery that is never far from the surface in American cultural life. “I am a reader,” the interior litany goes, “therefore I belong to a privileged minority; I patronize exclusive bookstores known only to me and my intellectual peers.” With the

York City, I did some mental measuring of the shelving and what it contained. There were, for example, approximately 189 feet of biography, 196 feet of philosophy, 92 feet of military history, 168 feet of poetry, and 165 feet of books and materials on foreign-language instruction, in Albanian, Amharic, Bengali, Urdu, Welsh, and Yoruba, among others. And what the chains don’t have, they will order. “It’s the most democratic forum, the most democratic marketplace of ideas imaginable,” the historian David McCullough has said. “No civilization has had anything like what we have now.”

What about the other charges—that the superstores are impersonal and full of ignorant salespeople? After several months of sampling both chains and

she proceeded to confuse it with another venerable series, Carolyn Haywood’s Betsy books. The store, in any case, didn’t carry them. At Barnes & Noble, on the other hand, I hit pay dirt on the first try: after only a moment’s thought, the young clerk led me right to the shelf where almost every volume in the series was stocked. Borders, too, I soon ascertained, carried the Betsy-Tacy books.

I decided to conduct a comparison in my neighborhood, which has both a Barnes & Noble and an excellent, medium-sized independent. I picked five titles that I happened to be looking for at the time and that were tried-and-true standards in their fields but not best sellers: *The Sicilian Vespers*, by Steven Runciman; *The Sixth Extinction*,

by Richard Leakey; *The Music at Long Verney*, a recently and posthumously published book of short stories by the British writer Sylvia Townsend Warner; *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America*, by Gary Cross; and *Jay Maisel's New York*, a photography book.

The independent had *The Music at Long Verney* and *The Sixth Extinction* but not the other three. Barnes & Noble had everything except *The Music at Long Verney*: according to the computer, it was in stock, but I couldn't find a copy on the shelf. The salespeople in both stores were pleasant and helpful but not particularly knowledgeable.

An oft repeated battle cry of the anti-chain lobby—that the independents stock books the chains don't carry—is untrue. The chains also have a vastly wider choice of books; the titles may not be lovingly handpicked or personally sold, but they're there. And in any case, there is a downside to hand-picking and personal sales: one may be subject to the whims, biases, and pretensions of an opinionated owner—or, for that matter, to the ministrations of supercilious sales clerks who, no matter how little they know about whatever author or subject you are searching for, still manage to act patronizing. For serious readers—those who want a store that carries not only John Updike's latest novel but all his in-print novels—the superstores offer infinitely more.

Many book-business insiders are justifiably worried about the concentration of power represented by the chains' centralized buying staff. Where 500 independent bookstores means 500 buyers, for example, 500 Borders stores use only a small staff to stock each and every store. The worst fears, however, have not been realized, although the malaise within the publishing industry continues. The comments of one senior editor at a first-rate literary press, who prefers to remain anonymous because of the delicacy of his relationship with the chains, are typical. "As a consumer living in the suburbs," he says, "I'm grateful for the chains and grateful for their presence in places where there often are no other stores; as a publisher, I'm grateful for the distribution but sorry for the concentration of

power. These people are very powerful in their selection—a new novel has to be pitched to and convince a handful of buyers that distribute it nationally." He believes, however, that at least so far the chains have done well by literary fiction, and he is both gratified and slightly surprised to see his own rather recondite titles in big suburban mall stores. "The number of places where good books can be found has increased dramatically over the past twenty years," he says. "It's easier for people to find out about books and get hold of them."

"Just what is so wrong with the chains?" demands Edmund Leites, a philosophy professor at Queens College. "Barnes & Noble carries an immense number of small-press books, and what they don't have they can get. I recently went there and ordered a very obscure book put out by a small press in Massachusetts and got it in just three days. What exactly is so bad? Tell me, why should we care about the collapse of snotty, understocked bookstores where they complain if you want to return a book?"

Another accusation leveled against the chains is that they promote best sellers at the expense of "midlist" titles—the book-business term for literary fiction and serious nonfiction. Within the industry there has for some time been a perceived crisis in midlist publishing, and in 1998 the Authors Guild, the Authors Guild Foundation, and the Open Society Institute commissioned a report on midlist publishing and marketing, which was carried out by the reporter David D. Kirkpatrick and written up in 2000. Kirkpatrick found that things were hardly going as badly for midlist books as everyone had expected; in fact, on reading his report, one doubts whether there is any crisis at all. Although the report complains that midlist titles are losing overall sales and market share vis-à-vis best sellers, it clearly demonstrates that the chains, with their tremendous capacity, have given not a blow but a boost to midlist titles: midlist sales have continued to grow, although not quite as fast as best-seller sales. "More midlist titles than ever before are available," the report says, "from both large commercial publishers and small

presses. More and more shelf space is devoted to selling them."

In part because of all the newly available shelf space, books from small presses are now actually experiencing what the study refers to as "a genuine boom"—the percentage of books from small presses bought by Barnes & Noble doubled from 1997 to 2000. Small presses, according to a study conducted by the Book Industry Study Group and the Publishers Marketing Association, constitute a rapidly growing segment of the publishing industry; in 1997 they accounted for 77 percent of the titles listed in *Books in Print*. The Kirkpatrick study asserts, without any substantiation, that the superstores stock these noncommercial titles only to fill shelf space and to attract, to put it bluntly, a higher class of reader. In fact, though, the chains devote not only more shelf space but also considerably more display space to midlist titles than to lowbrow best sellers; and as for really noncommercial books, the chains make them readily available to anyone who cares to browse.

"The main challenge facing midlist books is less in getting published," the Kirkpatrick study contends, "than in getting noticed and sold ... Chain-store merchandising policies help turn consumers' attention away from midlist titles and toward an elite of books that are backed by heavy marketing budgets." True, perhaps, but misleading, because a large proportion of today's blockbuster best sellers, promoted by the chains, in fact started out as midlist titles. Think of *Angela's Ashes*, *Cold Mountain*, *Corelli's Mandolin*, *Longitude*, *The Perfect Storm*, *Into the Wild*. Many of these books got their initial boost, it goes without saying, from enthusiastic independent stores that recommended them to customers. Once the word was out, though, it was the promotional and marketing clout of the chains that brought these relatively high-quality works to a mass-market readership.

Still, the anti-corporate rhetoric is compelling, so in February I decided to take a good look at what was being pushed at my local Barnes & Noble and Borders. In the Barnes & Noble at Sixth Avenue and Twenty-first Street, in Manhattan, I found that the mass-market

paperbacks—Danielle Steele, Mary Higgins Clark, Tom Clancy, John Grisham, Stephen King, all the brand-name stuff that pops to mind when we hear the words “best seller”—were clustered in choice positions around the cash registers, segregated from the main body of the store. On the ground floor the bookshelves were divided into two sections by a central aisle in which ten tables, each devoted to a particular subject, prominently displayed the books that the store, for whatever reason, happened to be pushing.

Many of these prime display sites featured midlist titles. On the new-nonfiction table they tended to be either by unimpeachably highbrow authors such as Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens or by respectable middlebrow ones such as Amanda Foreman and Jamaica Kincaid. On the new-fiction and “paperback favorites” tables Muriel Spark, Amitav Ghosh, Jean Echenoz (winner of the Prix Goncourt), Allegra Goodman, Ahdaf Soueif, Dorothy Allison, and Ha Jin were given pride of place. The store’s window display was 90 percent midlist.

What, then, is the so-called crisis really about? Is there any fairness in the Kirkpatrick study’s conclusion that the recent power shift from publishing to retail has meant that “midlist books wind up being printed but not really published”? Monstrous superstores are packed wall-to-wall with attractive midlist titles. Just how many more can be absorbed into the system? Steve Wasserman, the literary editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, states his belief that “we live in an age where no book, however mediocre, goes unpublished.” Even Jason Epstein, the longtime Random House editorial director whose recent *Book Business* hardly heaped praise on superstore marketing practices, remarks in its pages, “It is my impression that more such books [that is, “unconventional titles of permanent or even passing value”] are being published than ever before and more people are reading them, thanks in part to the chains and the online booksellers who have helped make book buying a stimulating part of everyday life.”

The marketing strategies of the chains, though carried out on a huge

scale, are hardly new or revolutionary. Tom and Louis Borders simply took the winning formula they had perfected in their famous independent Ann Arbor, Michigan, store and multiplied it; and Len Riggio appears to have copied the best features of the great independents, places like the Tattered Cover, in Denver, and Hungry Mind (now Ruminator), in St. Paul. In many cases the chains targeted neighborhoods that already had good independents, and many of these fell by the wayside during the first years of the superstore invasion; membership in the American Booksellers Association dropped from a high of about 5,000 in the mid-1990s to a low of about 3,000 in the middle of last year.

By and large, however, the best independents have held their own, thanks to some energetic rearguard actions and to the realization by the independents that if they are going to keep competing, they have to provide some of the more successful features of the chains, such as discounts, extended hours, comfort, and parking. Competition from the chains, in other words, has improved the services in the independents that have survived. Since last year the number of independents has continued to hold steady. According to Scott McKinstry, of the ABA, “We went through some frightening years in the 1990s, but the closings of independents have absolutely leveled off now.”

Wonderful though many of the independents were (and are), however, the fact is that most of the good ones were clustered in the big cities, leaving a sad gap in America’s smaller cities and suburbs—the places, in fact, where most of the American population actually lives. Books-A-Million’s 202 stores, for instance, are almost all located in the Southeast. Borders has from the beginning targeted another underserved market, the suburbs, and as a result the quality of life in American suburbia has radically changed over the past decade. This is a point that the urban intelligentsia, which loves to characterize the suburbs as a cultural wasteland, seems to have missed, or at least to have taken no interest in. It’s the same sort of contempt that causes highbrow folks to sneer at Oprah Winfrey and her book

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club—though Oprah ought to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for helping to keep literature a vital part of a popular culture increasingly dominated by the electronic media. Who but she could have put Toni Morrison—whose *Song of Solomon* and *Paradise* are not anyone's idea of lightweight reads—on the national best-seller list three times? “The Oprah craze has opened up a whole new world of readers,” says Irena Vukov-Kendes, the director of advertising and promotion for the major Random House imprints, Vintage and Anchor Books. “People who are not used to reading for pleasure are now reading a lot of quite challenging books.” The chains have had a similar impact on the nation's cultural life.

Smaller cities have also benefited: Borders now has superstores in places like Murray, Utah; Tacoma, Washington; Hagerstown, Maryland; and Henderson, Nevada. Edward Harte, a newspaper editor and publisher in the mid-sized city of Corpus Christi, Texas, remarks that before the advent of Barnes & Noble his town had no passably good bookstore at all. “Those of us who really wanted a bookstore had to drive to San Antonio,” he says. Although Harte has reservations about the impersonality of the chains, he is grateful for his local Barnes & Noble. “It isn't a cuddly, cozy place, but they're courteous and they have computers that can answer your questions. They even accept personal checks.”

The chains, in short, have met a need, especially for those living outside the great urban centers, and they have done this—not coincidentally, perhaps—at a time when public libraries have ceased to meet that need. In the past decade or so libraries have had to invest a large portion of their never-very-lavish budgets on computers, Internet connections, and software. As a result many libraries' book budgets and general services have been curtailed. Too often public libraries lack an adequate supply of books; too often the comfortable spaces that used to be available for relaxed reading and browsing have been swallowed up by computer terminals and video collections; too often staffs

consist of untrained volunteers; too often the facilities are closed in the evening and on weekends, while the chain stores, which function as perfectly sufficient reference facilities as well as reading rooms, remain tantalizingly open.

Even in bookstore-rich England many people have applauded the rise of their version of Len Riggio—Tim Waterstone. A 1999 article in the traditionally left-wing *New Statesman* went so far as to claim,

If any one person deserves credit for cheering up city centres it is Tim Waterstone ... The Waterstonisation of Britain has been one of the most civilising influences of the last years of the 20th century. Cities that lacked any decent bookshop suddenly got one; sometimes, with the competition, even two or three. Culturally it matches Allen Lane's invention of the cheap, good paperback when he launched Penguin Books in 1935.

“The book business was an elitist, standoffish institution,” Len Riggio told *BusinessWeek* in 1998. “I liberated it from that.” Riggio's critics have mocked his populist pose, but it should be taken seriously. Before the appearance of the chains, a relatively highbrow, urban clientele shopped at the independents, and a relatively lowbrow, largely regional one bought mass-market titles at supermarkets, price clubs, and drugstores. Now, thanks to the chains and to Internet sales, the vast territory between the two extremes has been bridged. Elitists may carp, but the truth is that they are no longer quite so elite. These days shoppers in Buford, Georgia, and Rapid City, South Dakota, can pick up important titles such as Norman Cantor's *Inventing the Middle Ages*, Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, and Andrew Motion's biography of John Keats—titles that are neither “popular” nor newly published—at their local Borders. (None of these books were available at the venerated independent Manhattan bookstores St. Marks Bookshop and Three Lives, or at Los Angeles's hip and highbrow Book Soup, when I called.)

“I admire what Riggio's done,” Steve Wasserman says. “In a country increasingly knit together, worldly, and wired, it seems that people everywhere are interested in everything. The regional

expansion of the chains is all to the good. There's a very big market outside the major cities. People are not the rubes that some people think they are.”

It is quite possible that five or ten years from now the chains themselves will be as seriously endangered as the independents looked a while ago. The future of bookselling is up for grabs. The chains have for years laid out grandiose and unsustainable expenditures—for physical expansion, deep discounts, and investment in technology—in order to compete with each other and to dominate regional markets; now the inevitable belt tightening has begun. Last year Barnes & Noble quietly ended many discounts, including its 10 percent across-the-board hardback discount, and substituted its own best-seller list (discounted) for that of *The New York Times*. Last October, David Kirkpatrick reported in the *Times*, “This year, the discount era in the bookstore business has virtually come to an end,” citing rising rents, the tight labor market, and increased investment in computer systems.

It is anyone's guess whether the chains will survive in the long run, especially in view of the changes that Internet technology is imposing on the retail book business.

“For the first time in my lifetime,” Riggio told *The New York Times* in 1999, “I can't see five years ahead the way I used to.” But in the meantime, readers are faced with an embarrassment of riches, writers with an unprecedented array of outlets. The good independents are managing to hang on to their customers and even to attract new ones; small presses are thriving; the chains and the Internet between them have made a wide variety of books more easily available, in more places and to more people, than ever before. Phyllis Odyssey, the creative director of the Book-of-the-Month Club (an enterprise that has stayed solvent, by the way, despite both chains and the Internet), believes that we are living in “a golden age” for book consumers. “Each business helps the others out,” she says. “The more people are exposed to books, the more they want to read and the more books they buy, from any source.” ■

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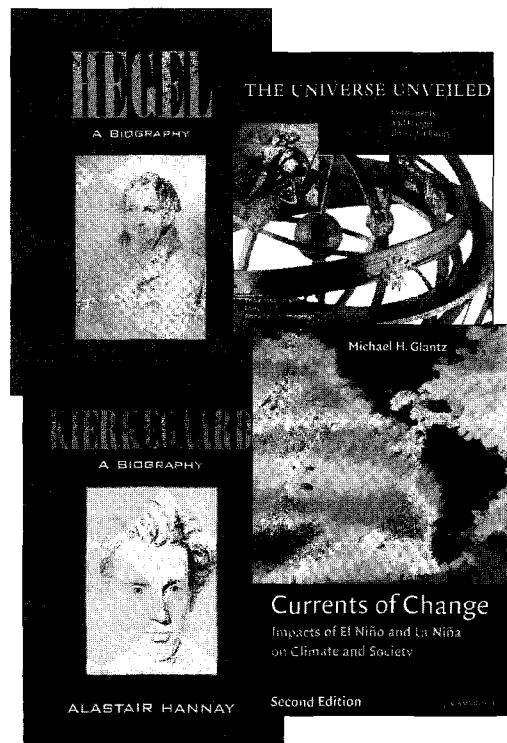
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A HARROWING MIRROR OF LONELINESS

Richard Yates was the supreme chronicler of American solitude

BY STEPHEN AMIDON

.....

Richard Yates just might have been the saddest writer America has produced. Solitude and sorrow pervade his fiction, marking it so deeply that his reluctant suburbanites, demobilized GIs, corporate drones, and dreamy women seem to be unwittingly engaged in the pursuit of unhappiness. Moments of joy or communion are as brief and bittersweet

for them as day trips from a convalescent ward. Set in an era when American triumphalism was achieving its self-congratulatory summit, Yates's work consistently reminds the reader of the depths awaiting those unable to make the climb.

Of course, Yates, who died in 1992 at the age of sixty-six, was not alone among his writing peers in providing a dissenting perspective on the so-called Greatest

Generation. Novelists as diverse as Jack Kerouac and John O'Hara also howled against their era, while social critics ranging from the best-selling Vance Packard to the deeply analytic Herbert Marcuse protested the corporate conformity that afflicts so many of Yates's characters. But with the passage of time it is becoming clear that Yates's achievement was of a different order from his contemporaries'. His writing is more than just a protest against the sterility of the suburbs and corporations that overtook the American landscape during the 1950s. At its heart his fiction is a painful exploration of the solitude that afflicts us all, whether we are bourgeois or bohemian, city dwellers or suburbanites.

This bleak vision pervades Yates's *Collected Stories*, written over a period of thirty years but set almost exclusively during the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations. From the tentative efforts of his first collection, *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness* (1962), which enumerated various strains of human isolation (an adopted boy in a new school; two Americans out of their depth in the jazz clubs of postwar

France) with an almost scientific precision, to the mature genius of late stories such as "Liars in Love" and "Saying Goodbye to Sally," Yates proved himself to be without equal as a chronicler of American solitude. Although many of his characters initially seem to be suffering from simple cases of the suburban blues (nothing that a trip to Paris or a year off to

write that novel wouldn't cure), it soon becomes clear that the facile distinction between the bourgeois and the bohemian is a reflection of the characters' own self-delusion rather than of the author's agenda. Again and again Yates's people misdiagnose the cause of their loneliness as a boring job or a conventional marriage, when these are in fact merely

symptoms of a desolation that endures even after they manage to break free of the mainstream. Although his stories have their share of unimaginative housewives and gray-flannel men who sink without a trace into the vast oatmeal of the American monoculture, the real pitfall facing his characters comes when they try to convince themselves that salvation lies outside of the ordinary. Thus the two women who attempt to set up a liberated, cosmopolitan haven in Westchester County in "Trying Out for the Race" soon find their idyll ruined by their own weakness and petty squabbling. As Yates wrote of the older of the pair, "if self-deception was an illness she was well into its advanced stages." Like so many of his characters, these women try to bolt the door against bland convention but manage only to lock it in. Jack Fields, the young writer in "Saying Goodbye to Sally," also seems to have escaped from the crushing grayness of the American middle when he gets a novel published and is then invited out to Hollywood to work on a film. But this appar-

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF RICHARD YATES

Henry Holt
474 pages, \$28.00



ent release from the ordinary only lands him in a different sort of solitude. His affair with his agent's secretary is doomed to bitter dissolution not so much by Jack's short-term contract as by the fine print in his soul, which allows him "to entertain the thought that he might be a self-destructive personality after all." Then "What saved him . . . was his knowledge that any number of sanctimonious people had agreed to hang that bleak and terrible label on F. Scott Fitzgerald too." Although Yates's literary peers were often willing to blame their characters' alienation on the big bad world, Yates had the honesty to look within those damaged personalities for the true cause: the self-deluding belief that their emotional flaws are romantic rather than simply sad.

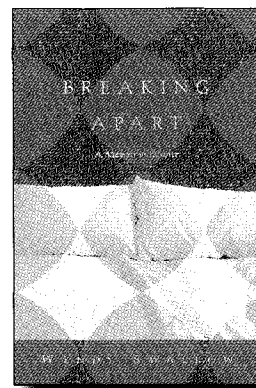
It is no mistake that Jack Fields sees himself in terms of Fitzgerald, whose spirit haunts not just this story but all of Yates's fiction. Fitzgerald's preoccupation with romantic delusion was a theme that Yates made his own, updating it to the ascendant middle-class ethos of the 1950s. At first blush Fitzgerald's Jazz Age characters, who crashed and burned in a blaze of class and money, seem to have little in common with Yates's doomed dreamers, who quietly try to break out of a web of corporate headquarters, tacky-tacky suburban housing, cocktail parties, and amateur dramatics that Daisy and Tom Buchanan would never have known. But a closer reading reveals that they are engaged in the same sad and fascinating process of trying to flee loneliness. The only thing separating Jack Fields from Monroe Stahr is that the latter gets a seat at the Brown Derby.

Dreams of bohemia aren't the only bacillus infecting Yates's characters. Many are forced, as was the author himself, to grapple with a real illness—tuberculosis. His stories provide a detailed picture of the last generation to suffer widely from the disease—and the first to have a good chance of surviving it. "No Pain Whatsoever" memorably depicts TB wards as places where "the sheets and the hospital pajamas were dyed yellow, to distinguish them from uncontaminated linen in the hospital laundry, and this combined with the pale green

of the walls made a sickly color scheme." Against this jaundiced backdrop Yates played out a variety of dramas, from adultery to romance to homoerotic combat, showing how the disease created a sort of spiritual stasis in the midst of America's hurly-burly, suspending sufferers in a limbo where emotions were free to fester and multiply without the intercession of workaday concerns. Reading these stories in conjunction with Yates's equally fine works on boot camp and combat, one is struck by just how deeply the men of his generation were affected by varieties of enforced communalism. The tragedy of their lives—as seen in "Out With the Old," in which an infirm father cannot find the words to counsel his pregnant teenage daughter—is that this communalism fails to cure the men of their loneliness. Tom Brokaw and his fellow generational enthusiasts would have us believe that this mandatory post-war togetherness made for a closer-knit, less alienated society, but Yates's work reminds us that the essential solitude at the heart of the American enterprise has never been easily escaped. His characters are always bowling alone, whether in the company of others or not.

Given the enduring integrity of his vision, it is not surprising that Yates's popularity now looks set to rival (if not to outstrip) that of O'Hara and Kerouac, whose reputations so often eclipsed his during his lifetime. Not only have his stories finally been collected into a single volume but his two best novels—*Revolutionary Road* and *The Easter Parade*—are also being reprinted with much fanfare. Although contemporary critics were eager to label Yates a social realist, we can now understand that realism was only his means to a deeper end. Whereas O'Hara's fulminations against status-seeking and Kerouac's rogue posturing are showing their age, Yates's writing retains the power to disturb us. There is a timeless honesty to his work; one need not know about Levittown or Tupperware parties or George Shearing to enter its emotional universe. The manner in which he describes an aging midwestern housewife in "A Natural Girl" is typical of the way his work starts out planted in the black-and-white reality of the 1950s, only to blossom into literary perpetuity.

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There wasn't much left of her once-lustrous hair except what the hairdresser could salvage and primp; her body sagged in some places and was bloated in others. She looked like what she was: a woman who'd been called Mother in shrill, hungering voices for most of her life.

The sentence starts out with the language of postwar Madison Avenue ("lustrous," "primp") and moves into the universal, flattening the reader with that heartbreakingly capitalized noun.

This ability to move from the specific to the universal can be seen in the collection's best story, "Liars in Love," about a love affair between a young American Fulbright scholar and an inexperienced working-class prostitute in 1953 London. The story is shot through with period references to the Rosenbergs and Joe McCarthy. It graphically re-creates postwar London as a place of crowded buses, raucous pubs, and "evil-smelling sulphurous fog that stained everything yellow, that seeped through closed windows and doors to hang in your rooms and afflict your wincing, weeping eyes." But as the two lovers find themselves trapped in a complex network of mutual deception, the period detail slowly begins to fade, the prose becomes less time-bound, and the action moves from bustling Piccadilly to featureless bedrooms and lounges that could be anywhere, anytime.

Here readers experience what lies at the heart of Yates's work—the beauty that can arise from the rendering of sadness and desolation. It is a beauty that derives not from writing-school mannerisms or precious prose but from the sense that truth—absolute, unadulterated, almost unbearable—is being communicated. As these stories begin to exert their considerable hold, the refined and the historical gradually give way to the raw, the immediate, and the unforgettable. Just as Joyce's slatternly maids, Hemingway's would-be writers, and Chekhov's country doctors prove to have souls deeply resembling our own, so Yates's company men and Junior League housewives wind up providing harrowing mirrors for our secret selves, however superior we may at first feel to them. The fashions and the furniture may have changed, but Richard Yates remains a dangerous and devastating writer. **A**

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BOOKS

THE TABLOID HABIT

Relentless celebrity coverage is a phenomenon as old as the movies

BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

.....

It takes about a quarter of an hour to read a copy of *The National Enquirer* if you skip, as I do, the medical-breakthrough stories and the regular feature called "Next Week on Your Favorite Soaps" and zero in on the celebrity gossip—and I have never found this time to be wasted. Although I make silent, unkept pledges to cancel my subscriptions to *People* (the better part of an hour) and *Vanity Fair* (two evenings), *The National Enquirer* delivers the shameful goods

so directly and with so few niceties—no Graydon Carter essay on Cartier-Bresson—that I can buzz through the whole thing and have it smashed down in the recycling bin before my husband has a chance to catch me in the act.

I began reading the tabloids during the O. J. Simpson case, which I fol-

lowed closely, and which *The National Enquirer* so thoroughly dominated that even *The New York Times* quoted it as a source. The Simpson coverage I read in the *Enquirer* (and also in the *Globe*, which revived a venerable tabloid tradition: publishing autopsy photographs)

was interesting, but the rest of these papers' contents surprised and intrigued me more. Before I started reading supermarket tabloids, my only sense of their editorial content had come from the old "Enquiring Minds"

television commercials, so I had expected when I bought my first copy of the *Enquirer*—sheepishly, half prepared to be scolded by the clerk—to find stories about Elvis sightings and alien abductions. Instead I found page after page of grainy photographs in which clearly recognizable, very famous people were

I WATCHED A WILD HOG EAT MY BABY!: A COLORFUL HISTORY OF TABLOIDS AND THEIR CULTURAL IMPACT

by Bill Sloan
Prometheus Books
255 pages, \$25.00

doing very ordinary things: sipping Starbucks coffee and dragging reluctant toddlers along sidewalks and tugging in irritation at the snug hems of unflattering bathing suits. Many of the pictures were of such poor quality that it seemed they had been taken as part of some kind of stakeout; they had the nature of private-eye photographs slowly developing in a chemical bath, and this greatly added to the sense that they really *were* somehow "explosive" and "revealing." For the past several years the tabloids have held me in a kind of demi-thrall, and rare is the week when I don't read at least one of them. What curious things I've seen along the way: Faye Dunaway in rollers waiting for cash at a poky ATM; Catherine Zeta-Jones exchanging what looks to be insurance information with a Volvo driver come afoul of her supertanker SUV; Maria Shriver stepping smartly out of mass while her husband trots behind her. Occasionally the photographs are of a quite different nature; occasionally they are—to use a tabloid word—so shocking that I can't believe it's legal even to take them, let alone to print them. But this has not, I confess, stopped me from looking at them.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RICHARD THOMPSON

The past few years, of course, have found the supermarket tabloids being held accountable for any number of cultural woes, only one of which is the death of Princess Diana. There is a sense that the general, indisputable coarsening of our common cultural life is in some way connected to the tabloids and what they represent, a sense based on a tacit assumption that the present mania for salacious details about the private lives of celebrities is a recent, lamentable aberration of public taste. In fact it is a phenomenon as old as the movies. In August of 1911 *Motion Picture Story Magazine* introduced an immediately popular column devoted to fan queries: "Answer Man." Although it maintained a strict policy against answering those questions deemed overly intrusive into the lives of the players, readers routinely sent in such questions in large numbers. Why the movies should engender this kind of interest is a thorny question, but surely it must have something to do with the strange and unique power they hold over their viewers. Geoffrey O'Brien has written a book on this subject, *The Phantom Empire* (1993); one of its epigraphs says as much about the complexity of his subject as anything in the text itself. It's from the description of a visit to the movies in *The Magic Mountain*.

But when the last flicker of the last picture in a reel had faded away, when the lights in the auditorium went up, and the field of vision stood revealed as an empty sheet of canvas, there was not even applause. Nobody was there to be applauded, to be called before the curtain and thanked for the rendition. The actors who had assembled to present the scenes they had just enjoyed were scattered to the winds; only their shadows had been here.

Images of movie stars, at once lifelike and spectral, and consisting, for most people, of only so much colored light or newsprint, have loomed over us for a century now. On some level the need of fans to see evidence of the actual flesh-and-bone existence of these phantoms must account for a wide variety of phenomena, not the least of which is *The National Enquirer*.

The famous, however, do not seem to embrace their role in this established tradition of obsessive fan interest. Rather, they report (regularly and with some pique) that it's hell on earth to be hounded by the tabloids' telephoto-lens wielding ruffians—not to mention dangerous. The car crash that killed Princess Diana became their galvanizing incident, their Triangle Shirtwaist fire, and they organized around it quickly, a brand-new oppressed minority consisting entirely of movie and television stars and the more photogenic members of the royal houses of Europe. What they wanted was a boycott of the tabloids and other outlets for paparazzi photographs. George Clooney emerged as a sort of Cesar Chavez of the famous, and the movement began to pick up speed. As rallying cries go, "Celebrities of the World, Unite!" was not one I imagined would garner much grassroots support, but the letters column of *People* magazine seemed to suggest that a good deal of sympathy did indeed exist for this new underclass, who were so downtrodden by the demands of the worldwide market for Hot Celeb Pics that they were forced to escape wearying photo ops in speeding limousines helmed by blotto chauffeurs. Diana's death brought about a period of intense sobriety and loudly proclaimed remorse in the tabloids. The infamous death-scene photographs, which almost certainly exist, and which in any other climate would have been splashed across every tabloid in the known world, became untouchable, unprintable. Steve Coz, *The National Enquirer's* young, Harvard-educated editor, went on the offensive, appearing on Sunday-morning news programs after the crash in an attempt to distance the *Enquirer* from other, more brutal tabloids that had made the late Princess's life so hellish. It was difficult, however, to believe that the publication was blameless, given that the issue of the *Enquirer* still on the supermarket racks the night Diana died bore the headline "DI GOES SEX MAD: 'I CAN'T GET ENOUGH!'"

So intense was public outrage at the tabloids in the wake of the Paris disaster that their very future seemed for

a few weeks to hang in the balance. The *Enquirer* and the rest of the gang, one began to suspect, were going to have to either fold or reinvent themselves completely—something they had done many times before. The quite fascinating history of these many incarnations—only the most recent of which is purely celebrity-driven—is the subject of a new book about the tabloids, *I Watched a Wild Hog Eat My Baby!*, by Bill Sloan, who has held editorial positions at both the *Enquirer* and the *Globe*. This exhaustive yet curiously flat book (did Sloan learn nothing about captivating prose during his tenure at the tabloids?) begins, of course, with the Kahuna of American tabloid publishing: Generoso Pope, the founder of *The National Enquirer*. Pope bought the old *New York Enquirer* in 1952 and struggled at first with what exactly to put in it—not much celebrity coverage, certainly, because that side of the street was thoroughly patrolled by the scandal magazines of the day. But then Pope had a Eureka moment, one that shaped his editorial policy for years to come. He described it to a fellow journalist this way: "I noticed how auto accidents drew crowds." Leading with whatever carnage his staff could dredge up (an early tabloid editor is said to have boiled it down during one headline-writing session to "he rape, kill her"), and with gruesome photographs available on the cheap from New York cops and morgue employees, Pope soon had a hit on his hands—and also a slew of imitators, including a Canadian paper called *Midnight*, which later became *The National Enquirer's* powerful rival the *Globe*.

The tabloids were soon flourishing. Not until the late 1960s, when these papers relocated from America's rapidly disappearing newsstands to its thriving supermarkets, did they begin to court a mostly female audience and to lay the groundwork for what they are today. For much of the 1970s and early 1980s the tabloids took the form of self-proclaimed "family weeklies," filled with what a *Washington Post* editor once characterized as SMERSH: Science, Medicine, Education, Religion and all that Shit. Gradually, however, they evolved into their present form: compendia of

intimately reported movie-star gossip, celebrity scandals, and “gotcha” photographs. The time was right for such an incarnation. In the past few years stars have come to enjoy a huge amount of control over stories printed about them in the legitimate press. Often they are granted approval of writers, of interviewers’ questions, of photographers. As a former writer for *Premiere* magazine told the *Los Angeles Times*, “There are more magazines than there are celebrities to go around. Given the law of supply and demand, it’s out of control—it’s a seller’s market.” Studio-driven publicity machines pump carefully crafted stories into countless unchallenging glossy magazines—virtually creating a concomitant market for stories of a less anodyne nature, such as those on offer in the tabloids.

As Sloan points out, Diana’s death turned out to have no lasting effect on the tabloids. For a brief period after the crash they were much cleaner (and markedly less entertaining), but in relatively short order they drifted back to their old ways, and the fleeting, remarkable period in which common folk manned the barricades in behalf of Hollywood royalty ended quietly. On the whole, the public’s attitude toward intrusive celebrity coverage has reverted to what it was before the accident. This attitude was summed up most recently in a couple of sentences from a *Los Angeles Times* editorial by the journalist Norah Vincent which appeared shortly before the Academy Awards broadcast: “In exchange for fabulous wealth, worldwide fame and the public’s undying adulation, they’ve got to put up with the paparazzi following them into the toilet. This seems a fair, if Faustian, bargain.” The Faustian-bargain theory is one that has long been advanced to explain the intensity of fan interest in the private lives of famous people, and it holds water. To be complicit, as all movie stars are, in the powerful projection of oneself into the imaginative lives of millions of people—including countless screwballs and thugs along with curious housewives like me—is to engender an ongoing fascination with one’s life as led off-



screen. Enter the tabloids, whose editors clearly understand that to seek fame so assiduously, to hire publicists to lobby for one’s interview with Kevin Sessums (and the semi-nude photographs taken to accompany it), to make not the hinter pages but the cover of *Vanity Fair*, to appear in states of simulated arousal and actual undress in blockbuster movies released on thousands of screens across the globe and supported by literally hundreds of press-junket interviews, is also to occasion interest in photographs of oneself picking up the newspaper from the front porch or quarreling with one’s spouse outside a restaurant or emerging cautiously from a hotel’s service entrance.

Reasonable as it is, however, I have never found this simple equation sufficient to account for either the enduring nature of this kind of fan interest or its peculiar savagery. Neal Gabler, in his exhaustive biography of Walter Winchell (who, of course, invented the kind of reporting that the tabloids currently practice), came much closer, I think, when he said that Winchell “understood that gossip, far beyond its basic attraction as journalistic voyeur-

ism, was a weapon of empowerment for the reader.” Gabler continued, “Invading the lives of the famous and revealing their secrets brought them to heel. It humanized them, and in humanizing them demonstrated that they were no better than we and in many cases worse.” Winchell, raised in poverty and achieving prominence during the Great Depression, cultivated a core audience not unlike that for the modern-day supermarket tabloids: working-class people both fascinated by the rich and ravenous for their demise—or, at least, for their humiliation.

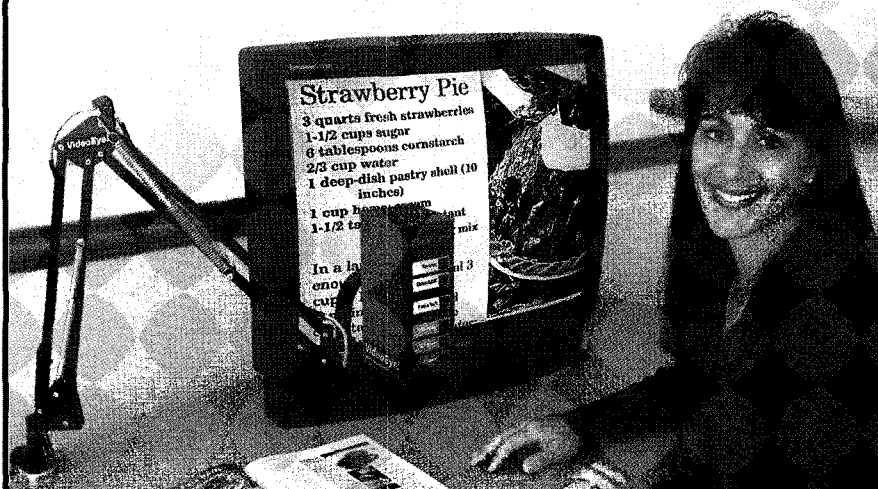
One need look no further than the advertisements in a few issues of the *Enquirer* to get a clear sense that its audience does not necessarily enjoy life at the top of the economic heap. There are ads for cockroach poison, for ladies’ knit slacks at \$5.00 a pair, for telephone legal advice for \$2.99 a minute.

The scandal magazines of the 1950s, which served up celebrity stories every bit as caustic and low-minded as those in today’s tabloids (according to a 1957 story in the *Los Angeles Times*, they regarded “a Hollywood bedroom as the center of American cultural interest”), were filled with ads directed at readers of a similar social class. “I WON’T be a CLERK all my life—I don’t HAVE to!” declared the first full-page ad in a 1957 issue of *Confidential*. Generally speaking, the more upmarket an entertainment magazine hopes to be, the better the treatment it gives celebrities it covers.

If seeing the rich dragged down to ankle level makes for satisfying reading, then show-business folk are in for particularly rough treatment, because they seem to engage in more than their fair share of scandals. What messes they get themselves into! From the misadventures of Fatty Arbuckle and Charlie Chaplin through Hollywood’s round-robin approach to marriage and a hundred other conventionalities, stars are forever serving up new predicaments for the tabloids to bathe in and gloat over. And best of all, from a tabloid point of view, is their preference for

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fast cars and private planes and illegal drugs consumed in unwise quantities. Because there is no tabloid story—none—that trumps the violent death of a star. The stories that will not go away, that are revived over and over, that are capable of enlivening the slowest news week, are always the ones that involve the untimely death of the famous. *People* has shaped its cover-story policy around this fact. The “cover formula” begins reasonably enough: “Young is better than old. Pretty is better than ugly.” It used to end (again, reasonably enough) with “Anything is better than politics”; but after the tremendous success of *People*’s cover story on the 1980 death of John Lennon (and after having badly misjudged the cultural significance of Elvis Presley’s 1977 demise and going to bed that week with an ill-advised Marty Feldman/Ann-Margret cover), the magazine added this final dictum: “Nothing is better than the celebrity dead.”

It has been this way since the dawn of the movies. The earliest rumors to swirl around movie stars involved, to a surprising degree, completely unsubstantiated reports of their violent deaths. According to Kathryn Fuller’s *At the Picture Show* (1996),

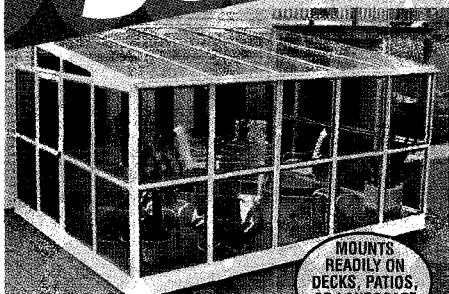
The Answer Man addressed such rumors frequently, resuscitating some film actor or actress in almost every issue ... Although many death rumors concerning film players may have been studio publicity “plants,” the wild imaginations of movie fans spread the rumors more efficiently and effectively than film producers ever could have done.

Certainly, our national zeal for celebrity downfall is largely accounted for by the basest of human pleasures. (Kenneth Anger, in one of his well-loved *Hollywood Babylon* books, reminded us of a relevant quotation from La Rochefoucauld: “We all have strength enough to endure the misfortunes of others.”) But the fact that the movies should so consistently produce these “wild imaginations” suggests something profound and powerful about their relationship with their viewers, something from which *The National Enquirer* and its fellows profit handsomely. ■

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NEW & NOTEWORTHY

*The summer game, sharp short fiction, are you U?
Hitchens on Ferdinand Mount*

.....

There couldn't be a better moment for the reissue of Bill Veeck's *Veeck—As in Wreck*. Originally published in 1962, this greatest of all baseball memoirs returns at a time when player salaries have reached new heights of absurdity and the sport seems headed for yet another labor shutdown—making Veeck's book appear less a throwback than a prophetic screed. The scion of an old baseball family (his father was the president of the Chicago Cubs from 1917 until the early 1930s, and Veeck himself helped to plant the fabled outfield ivy at Wrigley Field), Veeck owned, at various points, the Cleveland Indians, the St. Louis Browns, and the Chicago White Sox. He ran his teams with creativity and élan. Perhaps best known for signing a midget in 1951 (who walked in his only at bat), Veeck employed postgame fireworks, an exploding scoreboard, and a sense of accountability that baseball executives have generally lacked. His home number was listed to the end, and, unlike owners who demand new stadiums built with public money, he “never operated on the theory that a city owes anything to the owner of a baseball franchise, out of civic pride, patriotic fervor or compelling national interest.”

It's easy to lose sight of Veeck's importance in the face of all his gimmicks, but as this book makes clear, he was a baseball visionary. Again and again he took on “the feudal barons of baseball,” arguing against their old-boy tactics while pushing them to open up the game. In many ways Veeck helped to alter the dynamic of the ball field: his Indians became the first American League team with a black player when



VEECK—AS IN
WRECK: THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF BILL VEECK

by Bill Veeck,
with Ed Linn

Chicago
398 pages, \$16.00

they brought up Larry Doby, in July of 1947. Just as important, though, are his ideas on the business of baseball, which he consistently sought to improve. For Veeck, one of the sport's biggest problems was the divide between wealthy franchises and those on less firm footing, a divide he saw as threatening the stability of the major leagues. As a solution he proposed revenue sharing, a concept so radical that, nearly forty years later, it still has not been implemented in full. Lest this book sound like the stuff of history, just glance at the sports pages to see how little things have changed. But then, as Veeck reminds us, “When they listen to your ravings with indulgence, and, heaven help me, affection, you know you’ve joined the herd.” —DAVID UHLIN

This slim volume contains two novellas; the title of the first signals the author's ambition. “A Simple Tale” recalls Flaubert's “A Simple Heart,” and Messud's treatment of her protagonist, Maria, a survivor of the Nazi camps who is now a domestic, is equally intimate and pathetic. Maria's employer is going blind and dying; her slow demise (and Maria's fear of being alone) provides Messud a convenient frame within which to recount Maria's life story. After an opening hook that proves a red herring, the piece proceeds haltingly at first, but once under way, Messud moves time brilliantly, taking the reader through Maria's teenage years in German-occupied Ukraine, her young womanhood in a displaced-persons camp in northern Ontario, and the pedestrian humiliations of her work and disappointments of her family life, showing how unkind the years have been (as unmerciful as they were



THE HUNTERS

by Claire Messud
Harcourt
192 pages, \$23.00

to Flaubert's *Félicité*). The prose Messud uses to limn even the worst horrors is patient and restrained, almost Victorian at points, and the contrast between the petty domesticity to which Maria has dedicated herself and the nightmare world of her girlhood tinges everything with an odd insignificance. Like Flaubert, Messud is interested in how much people can endure across a lifetime without losing all hope.

The second novella, “The Hunters,” showcases Messud's talent for language and wicked sense of humor. Her nameless, genderless first-person narrator is a true fool, a pompous academic on sabbatical, and so self-absorbed as to border on the Nabokovian, which gives the author a chance to unleash an exquisitely tortuous prose, the old high style of Poe. The twit of a hero has taken a flat in a shabby section of London to do research on the subject of death, but he or she drifts into solipsism and paranoia, convinced that something is dreadfully amiss with the downstairs neighbors. It's a bit of a shaggy-dog story—as are some of Poe's—but always assured in the telling. Together the two pieces address the loneliness inherent in the human desire to be known and loved—“A Simple Tale” directly and deeply, “The Hunters” glancingly, by implication, and perhaps less successfully. —STEWART O'NAN

Nancy Mitford, who died in 1973, was not only one of the most entertaining novelists of the twentieth century but also a *provocatrice* of genius with an uncanny instinct for puncturing pretensions and probing sore spots. So when she began writing about her country's venerable and, to many, deeply offensive class system, in “The English Aristocracy,” a 1955 article commissioned for *Encounter* magazine, she knew that she was taking on a sensitive issue. A cruelly accurate observer of the upper class, and upper-class her-



NOBLESSE
OBLIGE:
AN ENQUIRY
INTO THE
IDENTIFIABLE
CHARACTERISTICS
OF THE ENGLISH
ARISTOCRACY

edited by
Nancy Mitford

Akadine/A Common
Reader, 159 pages,
\$19.95

self (she was the daughter of a baron), Mitford was well qualified for her subject, and the *Encounter* issue in which her article appeared was an immediate sell-out. But its success was largely owing to Mitford's tantalizing references to a scholarly article by one Alan S.C. Ross, titled "Upper Class English Usage." Ross, a professor of linguistics at Birmingham University, claimed that since members of the upper class were no longer "necessarily better educated, cleaner, or richer" than anyone else, they were distinguishable solely by their use of the English language. Ross coined the terms "U" and "non-U" to denote upper-class and non-upper-class usage: U people used the words "jam," "house," "rich," and "lavatory paper," for instance, whereas the middle classes exposed their inferior origins by saying "preserve," "home," "wealthy," and "toilet paper." Mitford was quite aware that her article would be annoying as well as amusing. "It's a sort of anthology of teases—something for everybody," she wrote to a friend. "I think it will be safer to be in Greece when it appears." In the event, the furor surpassed her wildest imaginings, with "Are You U?" becoming a sort of national parlor game (though real aristocrats tended to stay aloof, like the perhaps apocryphal dowager who, I'm told, flatly said, "My dear, if it's me, it's U"). In 1956 Mitford's and Ross's essays were published in a slim volume titled *Noblesse Oblige*, with comic illustrations by Osbert Lancaster, a sublimely non-U poem by John Betjeman, and additional essays by Christopher Sykes, "Strix," and Evelyn Waugh, who commented and expanded on Mitford's ideas: "Impotence and sodomy are socially O.K.," Waugh wrote, "but birth control is flagrantly middle-class."

Noblesse Oblige was published in the United States the same year, with a hilarious introduction by Russell Lynes. It has gone through many editions and has continued, amazingly, to hold its own despite the myriad changes that have overtaken both the language and the culture in the past forty-five years. Now in a handsome new edition, it will continue to give pleasure—even here in America, where, as Lynes remarked, "one man's U is another man's U-all." —BROOKE ALLEN

Flannery O'Connor once said that she didn't envy anyone inclined to write about Simone Weil. Revered by activists, feminists, and the followers of various religions, castigated for repudiating Judaism during the Holocaust, Weil remains a paradox, legendarily altruistic but also combative and fanatically stubborn. She was born in Paris, in 1909, to doting Jewish parents; wrote philosophical essays while driving herself to the brink of exhaustion laboring alongside factory workers; and even fought briefly in the Spanish civil war. Toward the end of her life Weil's thinking was transformed by a mystical experience, and at thirty-four she died of tuberculosis exacerbated by years of starving herself in solidarity with the world's hungry. Albert Camus adored Weil's work, Pope Paul VI considered her one of the three most important influences on his intellectual development, and T. S. Eliot said she possessed "a kind of genius akin to that of the saints."

Weil's ablest biographers, including her close friend Simone Pétrement and the psychiatrist Robert Coles, whose 1987 portrait was reissued in March, often seem cowed by her virtuousness, too tentative in exploring the irrational elements of her character. Francine du Plessix Gray, approaching Weil afresh in the Penguin Lives Series, errs in the opposite direction, needling her subject with great relish and sometimes expertly hitting the mark. When recounting Weil's refusal to heat her apartment out of sympathy with the unemployed, she suggests Weil's naiveté with an eloquent parenthetical aside: "(She would be surprised to learn that most of them lived in well-heated spaces.)" And by lavishing so much space on Weil's over-protective mother, who followed her daughter around (even to the Spanish civil war), cajoling Weil to eat, Du Plessix Gray profitably hints that the parental safety net allowed Weil to cultivate a distinctly adolescent rebelliousness throughout her short existence.

Unfortunately, Du Plessix Gray's



SIMONE WEIL

by Francine du Plessix Gray

Lipper/Viking
256 pages, \$19.95

dutifully researched but otherwise perfunctory chronicle too readily veers toward caricature. Her repeated emphasis on Weil's clumsiness, thick glasses, and "hideous clothes with which she habitually disfigured herself" is sadly ironic given Weil's principled abstention from the physical (Weil never had a lover or indulged her lifelong romance with food). At times one senses that Weil has aggrieved Du Plessix Gray on some deeply personal level. She laments Weil's "extraordinarily self-centered vocation for self-effacement," confessing a desire "to shake Simone by the shoulders and say, 'Come off it, you spoiled brat—get off your high horse!'" A smart, irreverent critique of Weil would have been fascinating, but Du Plessix Gray comes off as lightweight and weirdly seething. —ELIZABETH JUDD

In this book Margaret Visser takes us on an anthropologist's tour of an "ordinary church" (not very ordinary, because it is Saint Agnes Outside the Walls, in Rome, a fourth-century basilica constructed in an excavated catacomb). She shows us not just



THE GEOMETRY OF LOVE

by Margaret Visser

North Point Press
325 pages, \$27.00

the notable mosaics and classical columns but also lurid paintings of bloody hearts in a nineteenth-century chapel and a simulated Lourdes grotto in the piazza. This is the reverse of postmodernism: here myriad disparate images cohere intelligibly—in fact, miraculously. Visser, whose authority as a classicist is augmented by her Catholic faith and her sense of irony, leads us through the anterooms of mystery until we come to the church's very heart—the altar, and the tomb of the saint. *The Geometry of Love* is not a long book, but it is remarkably full of detail—etymologies, saints' lives, papal politics, ecclesiastical architecture, legends, folk practices, art history, all arranged to show how an "ordinary church" embodies the spirituality and history of its people. At times the reader longs to get on with the tour, like a visitor to a fine but exhausting muse-

um. But Visser's charm is considerable, and she often stirs the heart. She quotes ancient burial inscriptions on the walls of the stairway leading down to the church floor: "sweetest Epaphroditus"; "Susanna," remembered by "her husband Exuperantius"; the priest Celerinus and his sister Hemiliane; Assia Felicissima Succesa—"all of whose sibilant names survived." We find ourselves, as Saint Paul said, "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." Reading on, becoming initiated into their "ordinary church," we seem to join them. —ALAN BUSTER

Set in a Yorkshire seaside town during the last few weeks of the summer of 1946, this novel about a friendship among three seventeen-year-old girls—Hetty, Una, and Lieselotte—powerfully evokes the people and the period at the end of World War

II. Jane Gardam's characters are acutely and compassionately observed, but she is resolutely unsentimental in depicting either their flaws or their virtues. Hetty's mother, for instance, in her desperation to raise a little extra money, continually wastes the family's precious food rations to bake cakes that she cannot screw up the courage to sell to friends. The Lonsdale Café, where the ladies of the town meet to gossip and dissect their neighbors, is a showcase for mordantly funny dialogue. "I've no belief in women with careers," one of its habitués pronounces. "It shrinks the womb." No wonder the three friends are ecstatic when they win university scholarships, which will allow them to fly from the suffocation of small-town life. But will they be able to escape?

Their lives have been shaped by "the hollow of the two wars." The trenches of World War I have damaged the psyches of Hetty's and Una's fathers beyond repair. Hetty's—clever, handsome, upper-class—has become a humble grave-digger. "The grave-diggers in *Hamlet* have no names," he tells his daughter. "They are the only people of character and dalliance in Shakespeare who do

not merit names." Una's father committed suicide. The two girls are naturally drawn together. Lieselotte is an outsider in every sense: German, Jewish, bookish, she escaped Germany, but her family perished in Auschwitz. "They never had enough fun, any of these girls," Hetty's father remarks. The reader will have much fun, however, despite the darkness of the subject. Historical detail is never obtrusive but is deftly woven into the background: marrow jam, gray recycled soap, a carefully hoarded "tin of something from America." Gardam's lean, fast-paced prose is at turns hugely funny and deeply moving. We care about her characters and want to know what happens to them. —JULIET BARKER



THE FLIGHT OF THE MAIDENS

by Jane Gardam

Carroll & Graf
288 pages, \$25.00

Marisa Silver's first collection of short fiction evokes a Los Angeles that outsiders often overlook. Its characters exist along the fringes—of their city, of their families, and, in many cases, of their own lives. These pieces share an unsentimental vision of reality, in which, although they eschew false promises, people do their best to persevere. Not all the stories are successful. But when it comes to small moments—the frustrations and regrets of daily living—Silver's work is powerful and heartfelt, and nowhere more than in the relationships she depicts between parents and children, which she traces with a savage grace. "It occurs to me," she writes, "that a child is something that gets stolen bit by bit. A two-year-old dissolves into a five-year-old, and no picture can adequately bring back the feel of him, the sound of his voice, and all the intangible qualities that made him himself at that moment. A ten-year-old becomes fifteen, then seventeen. Then he slips out of your life altogether and the baby who once required your endless gaze now covers his eyes." That, it seems, might describe every character in this collection, for whom the art of living is elusive at best. —DAVID UHLIN

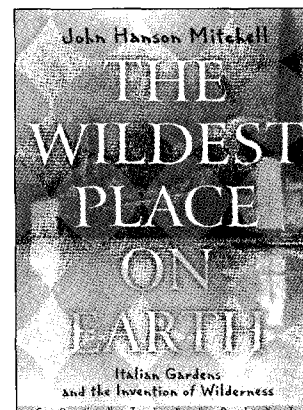


BABE IN PARADISE

by Marisa Silver

Norton
224 pages, \$23.95

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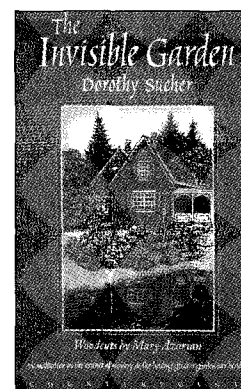


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This third novel by Jacquelyn Mitchard, whose first was the multimillion-copy best seller *The Deep End of the Ocean*, contains something for everyone: golf, death, babies, crusading state legislators, sex, chemotherapy. Its tale of in-laws fighting over what is best for an orphaned child could be compelling—could keep parents, in particular, reading in horrified fascination long into the night. But Mitchard repeatedly gets distracted, which is a shame, because the book starts sinking—tanking!—whenever it isn't moving briskly forward. The author frequently trails off into musings or moping or hopelessly hokey details (at the end of *five hours* spent watching her minor-pro-golfer husband hit practice balls, the young wife has tears rolling down her cheeks because her dearest has “the hands of a Michelangelo”). Mitchard's very earnestness works against her. For example, she signals her dislike of her golf-happy southern characters so insistently that the reader unwillingly begins to side with them against the author. So it's a miscalculation when, eventually, Mitchard tries to make an intriguing twist out of the idea that maybe those people aren't subhuman after all—even if they do come from Florida. —BARBARA WALLRAFF



A THEORY OF RELATIVITY

by Jacquelyn Mitchard

HarperCollins
368 pages, \$26.00

Diane Jessup's debut novel has a message: dogs think and feel, and should not be treated as if they did not. Its initially ambivalent heroine, Elizabeth Fletcher, comes to defy the values of her beloved father, a medical researcher, and grandfather, a surgeon, and even to risk her life, once she learns this lesson through her attachment to an extraordinary pit bull. The pit bull, based on Jessup's own dogs, is clearly her primary interest. Her most intriguing passages insightfully explore his view of the world and his motivations, which,



THE DOG WHO SPOKE WITH GODS

by Diane Jessup
St. Martin's Press
362 pages, \$22.95

Jessup deftly shows, are usually misunderstood by the human beings who observe him. Exploiting dogs for painful research, Elizabeth argues to her father, is “using them cruelly because you can, because they suffer in silence.” Often too pat, this is not a work of great literary merit, but it's a riveting story that gives eloquent voice to the dogs. —CHRISTINA SCHWARZ

First published in England in 1924 and recently reissued, this is a romance free of stickiness and sentimentality. It's a novel about ideas—what's more important, art or civilized society?—as well as the sort of delicious and merciless emotions that can make people exuberant or desperate. Lewis Dodd, a brilliant composer, is loved by two women. Warmhearted, uncorrupted, fourteen-year-old Tessa, the “constant nymph,” has grown up wild in various squalid European retreats, amid the loose morals of her genius father's unruly household. She learned “no conception of the word ‘ought,’” as her uncle observes. “She has only her instincts, her affections, and her quick wits to guide her.” Her pretty twenty-eight-year-old cousin, Florence, is nearly her opposite, the epitome of English propriety. Wonderfully polished, cultured, well-connected, popular by virtue of her tranquil good humor and general competency, Florence, unlike Dodd, puts “decency” and the “business of living beautifully” before art.

After Dodd marries the wrong woman, Margaret Kennedy relentlessly probes the ramifications of this triangle in high-toned, graceful prose. She is more knowing than her characters—of which the major ones are intensely believable and satisfyingly frustrating in their trueness to their natures—but she sympathizes with them as well. The compelling world she creates manages to be delightful while also proving that “unhappiness is, to a certain extent, the sure lot of every one of us.” —CHRISTINA SCHWARZ

**Margaret Kennedy
The Constant Nymph**



**THE
CONSTANT
NYMPH**

by Margaret Kennedy

Virago/Trafalgar
Square, 326 pages,
\$13.95

When we quote L. P. Hartley in saying “The past is another country. They do things differently there,” we utter a sort of tautology. Of course the past is another country; of course its inhabitants have a tendency to behave oddly. This is no more than to say that the past is past, or is not the present. Certain novelists have the ability to challenge this remorselessly obvious verdict—to narrow the divide between youth and maturity and to make both states, if not countries, real and immediate. On the evidence of this novel Ferdinand Mount is one of them.

I'll take a wild guess and say that for most people trying to recollect adolescence in tranquillity, the *madeleine* surrogate is likely to be early sexual awakening. It is so for the English and asthmatic Gus Cotton (the “Gus,” counterintuitively, is short for Aldous). In the 1960s the teenage Gus is tutoring the sickly children of a rich American family in Normandy. Out of the sun-dispersed mist on the sands appears to him the compact blonde figure of Helen Hardress, an English nanny working for some shady Iranians. The refulgence of the first sighting is not designed to deceive anybody; this girl with the forbidding name might be described as trouble with a capital *H*. From the first I was able to see her as one of those blondes who is entirely female but not in the least bit feminine; a recipe for misery among boys down the ages.

They used to say that none but the brave deserve the fair; Gus isn't particularly brave in any case, and he soon discovers that fairness has nothing to do with it. The Normandy episode ends badly: he is seduced (at least into heavy petting) by the lady of the house, who then becomes convinced that he is carrying on with another girl. He falls into the company of a huge, boisterous, and slightly sinister American tycoon. In fact, most of his emotional future is to be conditioned by this one calamitous summer at the seaside.

Of Gus's background we learn little,



FAIRNESS

by Ferdinand Mount

Carroll & Graf
320 pages, \$26.00

but some English racetrack chancers, described as cronies of his father's, put one in mind of the cheats and swindlers in John Le Carré's *A Perfect Spy*. And Gus himself, as he gradually discloses, is as an adult a minor functionary in the constipated little world of British intelligence. Part of his professional life, that is to say, consists of attaching himself like a barnacle to other people. His private life is the same: he picks up lukewarm friendships in any milieu where Helen can be found. The young men with whom she associates are anything but impressive, and Gus's self-esteem deflates as he slowly comes to understand that she will sleep with anyone—has slept with everyone—but him.

This crushing realization comes by way of a splendid roster of minor English characters, created by Mount for our amusement and Gus's torment. The scrofulous, self-pitying travel agent and racing-car enthusiast; the saloon-bar boaster and minor crook; the cynical, near sadistic gossip writer; the smooth, ruthless, arriviste civil servant—Helen beds them all and marries at least two of them, but she won't give the man who truly loves her the time of day, unless she needs a shoulder to cry on or a crisis dealt with. And he makes himself abjectly, eternally available. The measure of his almost canine subservience is the bliss he experiences when, as if on a whim, the little minx gives him a brisk, unsolicited, alfresco manual caress. But this offhand consolation (if I may be allowed the phrase) is poor recompense for what Gus has just been through. Visiting Helen in Africa, where she has gone to work for a dubious mining company, he discovers that the boss of the mine is the ghastly American tycoon and that she and the tycoon have been ...

This loosely plotted action is held together by a couple of recurring gags (Gus can't shake the contacts he made in his past, and he can't finish any of the classic novels he tries to read) and by the author's deftness with period. In a few sentences Mount can evoke the Britain of the 1960s and 1970s, the Thatcher years, and the onset of the present. In other words, Gus carries

this torch for the yellow-haired girl for decades. If he has had any other love life, we don't get to hear about it; a joyless later encounter with his former seaside employer leads to impotence on his part and—as if to underline the point that life is unfair—a series of Corsican revenges on hers.

The Englishness of it all is extraordinary; even when Gus goes to America in Her Majesty's service, he encounters only grotesques and caricatures of the sort one might encounter in a William Boyd pastiche. (And he gets drunk and makes a fool of himself like an Evelyn Waugh "innocent" abroad.) By the close Gus is middle-aged and used up and afflicted chiefly by feelings of pointlessness and waste. He has, though he never thinks of it this way, lost his life back there on the beaches of Normandy. Yeats was a great sucker for yellow hair, as Mount reminds us, and this book is at one level a literary reworking of Anita Loos's dictum that gentlemen prefer blondes. "She ties men up in knots," one character says of Helen to Gus, "just because her hair looks like a bunch of hay. If her follicles had a different juice in them, you wouldn't think twice about her." There are plenty of words for dark hair, of course, but once you've run through "raven" and "midnight black," you are pretty much finished for poetic purposes. Perhaps there just seem to be more synonyms for blonde—"honey," "flaxen," "golden," and so forth. Above all, though, the word "fair" is an ancient word for "beautiful." In our day it has acquired a second relationship, with the banal, as in "fairly good," "fair enough." The abyss between these meanings is the one that swallows up poor Aldous. —CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Recent books by *Atlantic* authors:

Edgewater Angels, by Sandro Meallot. Doubleday, 320 pages, \$22.95. The opening chapter of this novel first appeared in the July, 2000, *Atlantic* as the short story "Fish Heads."

Minus Equals Plus, by Istvan Banyai, with an introduction by Kurt Andersen. Abrams, 180 pages, \$29.95. The illustrator Istvan Banyai draws regularly for *The Atlantic*.



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WHARTON'S SHARP EYE

Our author, one of Britain's great novelists and literary biographers, explores Edith Wharton's short stories

BY MARGARET DRABBLE

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Short stories are best read in collections. Edith Wharton was one of the great exponents of the genre (one would find in her age have unhesitatingly referred to her as a master of it), and these two generous volumes, collected and edited by the novelist Maureen Howard, have a fine cumulative effect. Here are riches. Wharton attempted, and succeeded in, a dazzling variety of styles, from the fantastic to the realistic, from the satiric to the sentimental. Here are antiquarian themes—ghosts, fables, historical fantasies, and tales of crazed connoisseurs in love with the past. But here are also a number of incisive dissections of contemporary American and European customs. Wharton brought a new acuity to the debate between manners and morals. And she knew well how to shape a story. In “Writing a War Story” she created a would-be author, Ivy Spang, who finds herself paralyzed in front of her ream of mauve paper, unable to make any sense of her “plethora of impressions.”

The more she thought of the matter, the less she seemed to understand how a war story—or any story, for that matter—was written. Why did stories ever begin, and why did they ever leave off? Life didn’t—it just went on and on.

If Wharton herself ever suffered such doubts, she concealed them. She organized her material confidently. She shaped, selected, cut, and fashioned, and presented her readers with highly



EDITH WHARTON
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1891–1910
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1911–1937

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finished and highly satisfying professional products. As we read her, we feel that we are in safe hands. Her stories work.

There is so much in these two volumes, much of it previously unknown to me, that it is hard to know where to begin. Let us plunge into what might be thought to be the shallow end, with praise of one of Wharton’s lightweight stories, which satirizes the arbitrary nature of literary fame.

It is accomplished, stylish, and witty, and it made this reader laugh aloud. “Expiation” was originally published in *Hearst’s International-Cosmopolitan*, in December of 1903, when

Wharton had acquired a reputation as a writer but had not reached the large readership she was to gain two years later, with *The House of Mirth*. So she had not yet enjoyed or endured the experience of finding herself a famous author, al-

though the story shows that she had armed herself against it. “Expiation” is about a young woman novelist who is awaiting with a mixture of anticipation and fear the press’s reaction to the publication of her first novel, *Fast and Loose*. That title is an ironic reference to the unpublished novella by the same name which Wharton wrote in 1876–1877, when she was fifteen—a story about star-crossed love (in part a parody of the sensational novels that Wharton’s mother discouraged her from reading) which incorporated fictitious hostile reviews. A comparison with Jane Austen’s early work springs to mind, because Austen

began her literary career at much the same age nearly a century earlier, with *Love and Freindship* [sic] and other exercises in affectionate parody. Austen’s influence permeates Wharton’s work: both novelists took an attitude of sardonic delight toward the business of being a writer, and toward changing fashions in narration and genre.

In this entertaining exercise the novice, Paula Fetherel, a comfortably married and respectable New York society lady, is contrasted with her older cousin—the shrewd, worldly, and shabby-genteel Mrs. Clinch, once uncomfortably married to the thoroughly absent Mr. Clinch and now earning her living by writing what she dismissively describes as “pseudo-science and colloquial ornithology”—essays such as “Nests Ajar” and “How to Smell the Flowers.” A third specimen of authorship is introduced in their uncle, the self-important Bishop of Ossining, whose literary works include “The Wail of Jonah” (twenty cantos in blank verse) and “Through a Glass Brightly,” an edifying tale of a poor consumptive girl struggling to support her two idiot sisters. The bishop’s works, we gather, do not sell well.

The comedy lies in the differing approaches to literary creation of these three, and in their acknowledgment that violent denunciation of a work can contribute more to its success than faint praise. Wharton brilliantly evokes the exquisite torment of Mrs. Fetherel, anguished first by her husband’s indiscriminating admiration and “fatuous approval” of her efforts, next by a fear that her bishop uncle will be irrevocably offended by the light morals of her book, and finally by the agreement of the critics that *Fast and Loose* has a “pure fresh view of life.” This last blow is of course the worst. Our would-be Ibsen is filled with horror as she hears that her first reviewer considers her shocking critique of society to be a “pleasant picture of domestic life, which, in spite of a total lack of force in character-drawing and of consecutiveness in incident, may be described as a distinctly pretty story.”

All ends well, after a fashion, when the bishop is persuaded to denounce his niece’s novel from the pulpit, whereupon it immediately becomes a best seller. Mrs. Fetherel is driven to complain, when

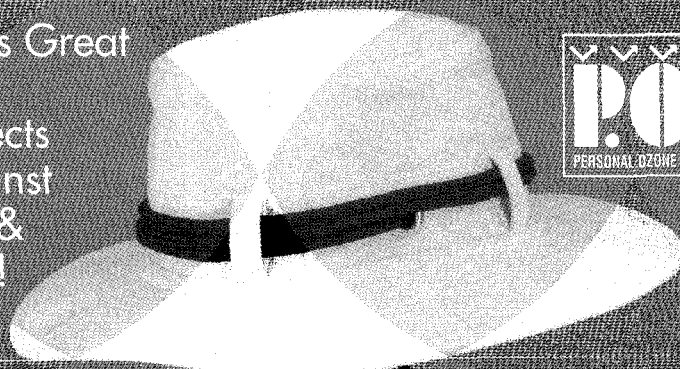
she sees her "New Edition with Author's Portrait (Hundred and Fiftieth Thousand)" emblazoned on the station book-stall, that "they've no right to use my picture as a poster!" She has come a long way fast and learned much since the day she told Mrs. Clinch "in an unconvinced tone" that she supposed a book must stand or fall on its own merits.

This satiric fantasy about the forging of a literary success is rooted in its own period; the commercial value of a bishop's denunciation clearly owes something to the notorious attacks on Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, a novel that caused great outrage when, in 1894, it was serialized in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. It was burned with much publicity by a bishop, and thereafter prospered. (In his preface to the 1912 edition Hardy wrote that the book was "burnt by a bishop, probably in his despair at not being able to burn me.") But "Expiation" is also a story for our time; violent denunciations, though not these days by bishops, continue to sell copies.

Wharton had a sharp eye for the whims and dictates of fashion in literature, in art, in intellectual debate, in décor, and in haute couture. She could detect a fake, and she could recognize the real thing. She was in every sense a well-traveled woman of the world, and the range of her discrimination was considerable. She was no modernist in manner, but she was formidably well read and relentlessly up-to-the-minute—indeed, ahead-of-the-minute—in her methods of social analysis. Her astute perception of the changing of fashion in morals has long been recognized as one of the major strengths of her novels, and in many of these stories she applied herself to charting the new social map of the twentieth century. She foresaw the declining power of conventional religion and the growth of various forms of relativist thinking. (In "The Seed of the Faith" she sketched, with a sympathetic and admirably understated assurance, the doubts of a poor young missionary stranded in North Africa who has been made tragically aware of his own ignorance by two or three talks with "a quiet French ethnologist who was studying the tribes of the Middle Atlas.") She drew the graph of the inexorable rise in the

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Each box belongs to Pandora and uses "P and/or A" to make new words Across and Down. The new words in order are APART and PASS, PAMPA and DAIS, GRIPPE and EARLAP, APOGEE and KNEEPAD, BURLAP and PALACE, CARESS and APICES, PLOW and PAFAP, HOPE and TOGA.

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divorce rate, and the slow and at times hesitant movement toward the emancipation of women. In "The Reckoning" and other stories she carefully delineated the high personal cost of struggles between theory and practice for those who professed to believe in what she labeled "The New Ethics." Divorce and various manifestations of adulterous love provide many of her plots, and her tone modulates from the ironic to the tragic to the tragicomic, sometimes subtly shifting within a single story.

We are accustomed to thinking of Edith Wharton as the chronicler of unforgiving codes of behavior and of the fierce and cruel exclusivity of New York's aristocratic old money, but some of the stories here strike a shockingly modern note. In "The Other Two" the happy husband of a charming and much married woman comes, by a sequence of bizarre coincidences, to be entertaining his two predecessors at tea in his home, a situation that, he finds, loses its grotesqueness through the "sense of ease and familiarity" with which his wife greets her unexpected visitors. That phrase is beautifully chosen, and speaks volumes: this is a new world—though whether or not the complaisant third husband will long remain happy in it is another question.

Compare the more somber note of "Autres Temps" and "The Long Run," both of which deal with age and failure in the sexual arena. In the first of these Mrs. Lidcote, exiled from New York for many years owing to a sexual transgression, returns home to her newly divorced and newly remarried daughter, amid bewildering assurances that divorce is now socially acceptable. But she finds herself entering a maze of innuendo and misapprehension, in which she is rejected even by those who are most eager to tell her that all is changed. For her daughter, maybe, the future is here, and it is bright. But for Mrs. Lidcote it is too late.

Similarly, in "The Long Run" a courageous and unorthodox married woman risks all, in *Anna Karenina* mode, by offering herself to the man who loves her, in the full awareness that he is already envisaging, à la Count Vronsky, a post-elopement future of "listless couples wearing out their lives in shabby

watering places, and hanging on the favour of hotel acquaintances; or the proud quarrelling wretches shut up alone in a fine house because they're too good for the only society they can get." But her courage is in vain: he rejects her and the idea of an improvised life together, and "in the long run," as we are shown, they both—having missed this one chance, this one choice—dwindle into conformity and mediocrity.

Wharton depicted women caught between constraint and the possibilities of a new sexual freedom—a freedom that she herself enjoyed, though at high cost. She portrayed the historical deformations imposed on women by social relations and expectations—within the family, between the sexes, and between women. Female rivalry and jealousy—emotions of the old regime which Virginia Woolf predicted would pass away under the new—are well caught in the celebrated "Roman Fever."

Wharton's descriptions of the maternal deformation are particularly interesting. She had no children, and she was not generally overindulgent toward the maternal impulse. Her early tale "The Pelican" is a simple story of misguided and destructive motherly devotion. The long and deeply ambiguous "Sanctuary" is a much more complicated piece that does not lend itself to any one definitive reading. Is it a portrait of benign and altruistic maternal love or of blighting maternal possession? Are we presented with a woman who fatally retards her son, preventing him from finding true adult freedom, or with a woman who saves her son from his father's fate of moral turpitude? The tone is so evenly balanced that it is almost impossible—indeed, I think it is impossible—to be sure. The psychological insight into motive is so keen, the moral meaning of the acts within the story so opaque, that the story takes on its own meaning. We can interpret it as we may, or as Freud might have us. It is a fine portrait of inner conflict, but the good angels and bad angels wear multiple disguises.

Less ambiguous, but equally gripping, is the later "Her Son," about a beautiful widow in search of a son born out of wedlock, whom she guiltily gave up for adoption before her marriage to

the child's father. In middle age she is possessed and obsessed by her quest, and eventually destroyed by it. The intricate turns of the plot are finely handled through the medium of a semi-detached male narrator, a ventriloquist device familiar from the works of Henry James, and a device that Wharton frequently employed with great assurance. (She clearly felt safer with the authority of the male narrative voice: rarely in these stories did she risk a female narrator, though she was confident with female subjects and the female point of view.) "Her Son" is a thoroughly satisfying tale in which each revelation, including the last and most astonishing, has a natural inevitability. "Sanctuary" is marked by improbable incident; here the events, though even more melodramatic, are more cunningly connected. It is a well-shaped story in the mode of Guy de Maupassant, its power residing in the last twist of the knife.

The short-story form lends itself to the melodramatic initiatory or concluding event, and Wharton certainly did not eschew such effects—though it is worth noting that her life contained its fair share of melodramatic incidents, in the form of unexpected legacies, financial misdemeanors, and early deaths. Typhoid and tuberculosis and bankruptcy were handy tools for the author, providing sudden death or disgrace when needed, but they also reflected a familiar social reality: artists did indeed die of ill health in garrets, and businessmen were ruined on the stock exchange. Not even Wharton's circle of friends, leading their luxurious *rentier* lives, were immune to the diseases of their day: her contemporary, the upstart but highly successful novelist Arnold Bennett, like Wharton an aficionado of steam yachts and motor cars and other forms of expensive travel, managed to die of typhoid after drinking water from a carafe in a Paris restaurant—an incident that he, in his major realist vein, would have been unwilling to invent. So one cannot convict her of dwelling too much on the accidental and the improbable. Like Bennett, Wharton was fond of fantasies of sudden wealth, and made good use of them in stories like the perfectly pitched comic fable "Velvet Ear-Pads" and "The Letters," in

which the life of a poor little teacher, Lizzie, is transformed by an unexpected legacy. Unlikely, one might protest; but Wharton herself, hardly in such desperate need as Lizzie, had learned in 1888, while on a cruise in the Aegean, that she had inherited \$120,000 from a "reclusive New York cousin."

Wharton was in many ways blessed to have been born into a life full of agreeable choices, but she paid a high price for it in her often prolonged nervous and physical illnesses. She did not dwell much on inward descriptions of nervous prostration. Her characters, both male and female (apart from those doomed to disaster by plot), tend to the energetic and the robust. Perhaps it is in her ghost stories that the subplot of her ill health and the exhaustion of her own struggles emerges. There are several classic ghost stories here, and nearly a third of the collection (twenty stories out of sixty-seven) has a touch of the supernatural and the macabre. Ghosts were in vogue, and Wharton no doubt wrote partly to please her public.

Her models included Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), which reappears here in several guises, and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and the less supernatural but heavily haunted *The Aspern Papers* (1888). M. R. James, the author of the lastingly popular *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904), makes his presence felt, and one can also detect the influence of Rudyard Kipling and Thomas Hardy, both of whom were intermittently attracted to the genre. Wharton handled the form with considerable dexterity, though it has to be said that some of her efforts are little more than conventional attempts to chill the blood, with the usual apparatus of revenants and curses and hauntings in country houses. One could argue that the theme of the imprisoned damsel reflected the social reality of the powerless turn-of-the-century woman, and Wharton offered several variations on this possibility—including a daughter imprisoned by her father and a long-dead wife guarded by a ghostly butler. But her effects are neither original nor wholly convincing, though the stories are enjoyable enough. One feels that her

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pen and her purse were more involved than her imagination. Nowhere did she achieve the mythic resonance of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, although she borrowed a few effects from Shelley, too.

For me, perhaps the most effective of these ghostly tales is a strange little piece called "Miss Mary Pask," atmospherically set in Brittany, where the detached male narrator takes it upon himself to visit the reclusive old sister of an American friend, who lives alone by the sea in a house on the Baie des Trépassés. He arrives, of course, at night, in thick fog, with a reluctant guide, who abandons him. He finds Miss Pask, white and twittering, but even as he finds her, he remembers that in fact she is dead—he had forgotten (a little improbably) that she had died the previous autumn. The story ends with a twist and a naturalistic explanation, but the encounter between the old woman and the young man is finely done, and the fragility of her old body is intensely evoked: "I looked at the soft wrinkled fingers, with their foolish little oval finger-tips that used to be so innocently and naturally pink, and now were blue under the yellowing nails—and my flesh rose in ridges of fear."

In one of the longest and strongest stories in this collection, "The Marne," a hint of the supernatural offers itself as a positive blemish. This is a powerful and for the most part thoroughly controlled account of a young Francophile American's response to World War I. Wharton made excellent use here of her involvement in relief efforts in Paris and on the Front, which she visited several times. The reactions of panic-stricken Americans caught in Europe at the outbreak of war are described with a wit equal to that in Thackeray's treatment of the Battle of Waterloo in *Vanity Fair*. Her depictions of vacillating American reactions to the need for engagement make bracing and salutary reading. All this is observed in vivid, damning, and authentic detail: Wharton's comments on those patriotic converts, at first complacently isolationist and later noisily and militantly convinced of "America's mission" and "Liberty's chance to Enlighten the World," retain a sinister and dangerous topicality.

We are also persuaded by and attracted to the character (though perhaps

not the overweighted name) of the hero, young Troy Belknap, in love with France from his early years, when he sailed with his family from New York "every June on the fastest steamer of one of the most expensive lines." His youthful passion for France echoes Wharton's own, and she believably conveys his frustrated masculine regret that he is too young to fight for his adopted country; as the war drags on, he has to satisfy himself by working with the ambulance brigade. In the denouement Troy finds himself at last, by accident, engaged in active combat in the second battle of the Marne. (There are honorable echoes here of the young Fabrice del Dongo's adventures at Waterloo in Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*.) All this is so well done that it seems a pity that Wharton allowed a sentimental and supernatural conclusion. Troy's much loved French tutor, killed four years earlier in the first battle of the Marne, appears as a rescuing angel. Wharton's prevailingly ironic narrative mode knits uneasily with such a resolution.

"The Marne" is dedicated "To the memory of Captain Ronald Simmons, A.E.F. who died for France August 12, 1918." As I wrote this, I was too far from my own or any other English-language library to look up the true story of Captain Ronald Simmons, which might have led me to revoke my strictures. Perhaps I can make recompense for those strictures by a short, ghostly coda of my own.

I wrote this in Venice, surrounded by ghosts. I went there on December 31, to spend a month and thus to avoid the inevitable fuss attendant on the publication in England of my latest novel, which had been denounced in advance (unread) not by a bishop but, for reasons I well understand, by various members of my family.

I arrived in Venice in what I fancied was rather a Whartonian style, though perhaps a little less grand, with a half-finished new novel to work on, and the Library of America loose-leaf page proofs fluttering around me like sibylline leaves. (The last page of Wharton's last ghost story, "All Souls," was, mysteriously, missing. That was an alarming and frustrating discovery—would I ever find

out what happened?) Reading Wharton in Venice proved, as I had expected, a treat, and I found, as I knew I must, an excellent story set in Venice: "A Glimpse." Beautifully narrated by that familiar worldly male observer, it concerns the power-structured rivalry of a male cellist and a female pianist. I chanced upon this story the day after I had been to a Vivaldi concert in the church of San Bartolomeo, near the Rialto, where the demeanor of the cellist and the pianist had given rise to some imaginative speculation. Such things happen here. And that night, walking back home over the Rialto, it just happened that I observed a total eclipse of the moon.

I was staying in the apartment of a friend of mine and my daughter's. It belonged to her great-aunt, who died five years ago, at the age of ninety, leaving the apartment full of her presence and her memories. She was a painter, and her still lifes hang on the walls. Her books, her playing cards, her cooking utensils were still there; her umbrella was in the umbrella stand, and her unfinished embroidery lay in a drawer. Her fluffy tortoiseshell cat consented to come in from the garden from time to time to crunch up some food.

Venice was enchanting and alarming and spectral in midwinter. The blue-green high water lapped on the steps down to the little canal below my bedroom window, and for two thrilling days I was cut off at high tide from the *campo* where I went to buy milk for myself and the cat. A siren called its warning each morning through the ghostly gloom. The high water at the beginning of January was followed by a bright and bitter chill, with temperatures well below zero. Icicles dripped from bridges. I found I had not brought enough warm clothes.

In one of the wardrobes hung some of the aunt's clothes—good, serious, well-tailored clothes from which her niece could not quite bring herself to part. One chilly night I tried on the aunt's fur coat. The coat fitted me well. I was tempted to sally forth in it, to walk the cold, silent, and desolate streets of the *sestiere* in it. Had I done so, surely a neighbor, looking out from a window, would have said to herself, "There walks the ghost of my good friend Elena Ballerin." ▀

IN GLASS'S HOUSE

More a classicist than an avant-gardist, Philip Glass embraces rock music without imitating it

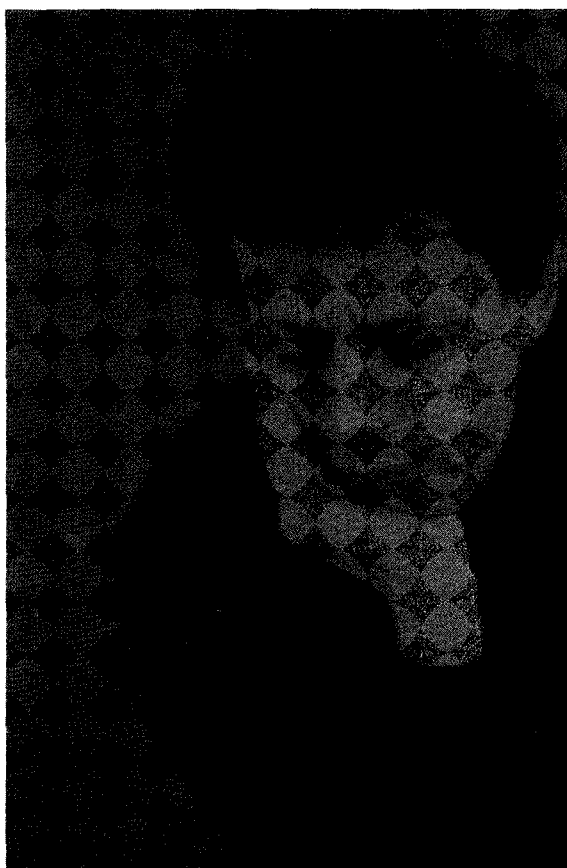
BY DAVID SCHIFF

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One snowy night last January, I found myself in a bar in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the good company of William Bolcom, who is one of our most successful contemporary opera composers—his *A View From the Bridge* earned raves at its Chicago Lyric premiere in 1999. Bolcom began his music career playing piano at burlesque theaters in Seattle, and he has a lot to say about almost every kind of music. Gathering that we were musicians, the bar's owner proudly boosted the volume on the randomly ordered CDs she was playing. The music was as agreeable as the setting—perhaps too agreeable, because Sarah Vaughan, Frank Sinatra, and Ella Fitzgerald make it hard for two composers to talk shop. Just as we were about to solve the problem of opera, inspired—or at least undeterred—by “My Funny Valentine,” the music changed from jazz vocals to something that sounded almost Baroque. Against a syncopated orchestral accompaniment a (solo) violin noodled Bach-like arpeggios—although in Bach they would have modulated rather than looped. Then the violin played and re-played a simple, plaintive phrase. The repetitions were not grating but soothing, and they stopped our conversation. Bolcom lifted his drink to one of the speakers and said, “Hello, Philip.”

Philip Glass is probably the only American composer since George Gershwin whose music could work equally well in a cocktail lounge (the CD was his Violin Concerto) or a concert hall. The music world has not yet made up its mind whether this is a good thing. Twenty-five years after *Einstein on the Beach* changed the course of American music, Glass and the musical establishment still view each other with suspicion. Several important conductors, including Dennis Russell Davies and Carl St. Clair, champion his music, whereas others who often program the equally minimalist

works of Steve Reich or the postminimalist works of John Adams steer clear. Some critics have raved about Glass since the early 1970s, but others remain unamused: in *New York* magazine Peter G. Davis called Glass's opera *The Voyage* (which had its premiere at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1992) “star trek,” and Terry Teachout dismissed Glass's recent Symphony no. 5 in *Time* as “same old same old.” Glass has yet to be recognized by the Pulitzer committee, which has so far cold-shouldered the minimalist movement altogether.



Perhaps parrying with his own ambivalence, Glass keeps a certain distance from the classical world. He devotes most of his energies to the theater, where he formulated his minimalist style back in the late 1960s, and to his own rock-ish amplified band, the Philip

Glass Ensemble, rather than to the usual instrumental ensembles of the concert hall. Yet he is America's best-known composer of art music, and he has also built up such a considerable catalogue of concert pieces—five symphonies, four concertos, five string quartets—that concert producers should have trouble making excuses for not programming him. The tide may be turning: the Lincoln Center Festival recently announced that Glass is its featured composer this year, and other festivals will likely follow its lead.

A large part of the resistance may have come from the fact that in the eyes of many in the classical world, Glass inherited the Emperor's New Clothes chair in contemporary composition from John Cage—who attained similar celebrity and notoriety, and who was similarly snubbed by the Pulitzer committee. Cage was known more for his ideas about chance and silence than for his compositions; Glass has been reduced to the idea of repetition. Unsympathetic critics who hear his latest work and find that Glass is still using repetition assume that he is peddling his one gimmick. They are missing the point. Though Glass first appeared in the milieu of the post-Cage avant-garde, he has turned out to be something else entirely—not an anarchist but a restorationist, stripping away hundreds of years of musical “progress” to return to basic principles of musical construction.

Glass's music is not for everyone. I like it more and more, but when I started working on this article, my wife and daughter threatened to move out of the house until I was finished with “that dizzy music.” Classical listeners who want to acquire a taste for Glass might proceed as they would with another challenging composer—say, Bruckner or Satie or

Literary Lives

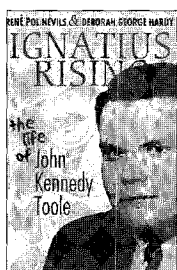
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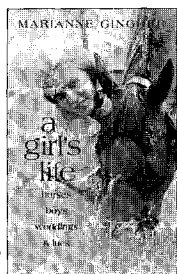
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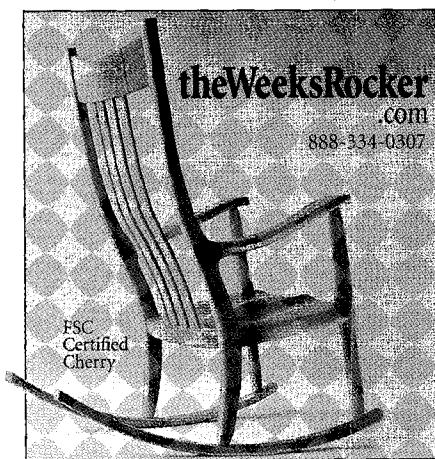
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Busoni—and listen to a lot of his music until its pleasures and principles become clear, and distinct from those of other composers. Heard in extenso (there are fifty-two Glass CDs listed on Amazon.com), Glass's oeuvre propounds certain consistent ideas and also takes surprising turns. A useful anthology, *Writings on Glass*, edited by Richard Kostelanetz, provides revealing criticism and interviews in which Glass is by turns cocky (he brags of outwitting Copland when he was a student at Aspen), down-to-earth, and utterly convinced of his mission.

For the reluctant newcomer the mellow, romantic Violin Concerto or the infectiously danceable *Glassworks* (later choreographed by Jerome Robbins) might be the easiest point of entry. But I would suggest instead biting the bullet and starting with *Music With Changing Parts*, from 1970. If you can overcome your resistance to this (and you may not), the rest of the music will sound like ear candy. *Music With Changing Parts* is classic minimalism, the aural equivalent of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*—a raw, relentless sixty-two-minute sound barrier. The music, written for the amplified instruments of the Philip Glass Ensemble, repeats and transforms a short phrase, using a process of rhythmic addition that Glass developed when he studied with Ravi Shankar. The transformations are so subtle that at first they are barely noticeable, especially because the timbre, tempo, and dynamics of the piece remain the same. But gradually the piece evolves: the listener begins to perceive resonances beyond the forbiddingly monomaniacal surface, and to hear connections with rock and Indian music. What at first sounds sweaty and secular gradually becomes ecstatically spiritual. Midway through the onslaught you may find yourself floating pleasantly toward nirvana.

In its sensibility and intellectual style *Music With Changing Parts* seems inseparable from lower Manhattan in the 1970s: CBGB, The Ramones, Talking Heads, modern dancers spinning themselves dervish-style into nausea or bliss. (Cynics might add two less prestigious seventies phenomena to the list: disco

and New Age music.) Glass gave minimalism the self-conscious punk attitude of seventies avant-rock and the intellectual rigor of conceptual art.

Musical minimalism had ties to visual minimalism—Steve Reich to Sol Lewitt, Glass to Serra and Chuck Close. Both forms have a cool and clean aesthetic that is miles from the expressionist agonies of Arnold Schoenberg or Jackson Pollock. But whereas minimalist art tended to be dour and cerebral, minimalist music moved toward either the popular or the spiritually exalted—or, in Glass's case, both. In the early seventies his music seemed like an exclusively avant-garde, art-world phenomenon. Glass played in lofts and galleries and received no support from the usual foundations; in one recent interview he defiantly listed the funding sources that had rejected him.

The turning point was *Einstein on the Beach*, which was first performed in America at the Metropolitan (though not by the Met), in November of 1977. Like many works that appear revolutionary, *Einstein* was a summation of ideas from the preceding age. Like the collaborations of John Cage and Merce Cunningham, it mixed dance, words, spectacle, and music in a determinedly uncoordinated way. The only musician onstage was the figure of Einstein, with his violin; singers and all other instrumentalists were in the pit. Instead of lyrics the singers recited numbers or solfeggios. In other words, it was an evolved "happening" and its presiding genius was not Glass but the director, Robert Wilson.

Nonetheless, the cumulative power of the music, especially in the climactic spaceship scene, made Glass world-famous. He soon set to work on two more operas, this time commissioned by opera companies, about history-making figures: *Satyagraha* (1980), based on Gandhi, and *Akhmaten* (1984), based on the Egyptian pharaoh who tried and failed to institute monotheism. Unabashedly identifying himself with these revolutionary heroes, Glass moved decisively and surprisingly beyond the aesthetic of *Einstein*. With these operas the mature Glass appeared, and all traces of the "happening" era vanished. (The CD

Songs From the Trilogy is a good introduction to the three operas, and to Glass's later style.)

Glass's most telling radical move was to transcend the whole category of the avant-garde. In *Satyagraha* and *Akhmaten*, Glass affirmed the truly decisive influence on his music—not Terry Riley, the founding father of minimalism, but Nadia Boulanger, with whom he, like so many other American composers, had studied. He turned out to be the most Boulanger-influenced of all American composers, more so than even Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, or Elliott Carter.

Boulanger's teaching was essentially technical: score reading, counterpoint, solfeggio, and analysis. Aesthetically she stressed two qualities: classicism (economy of means, making every note count) and personal style. Every detail of a piece, Glass learned, showed the unique voice of its composer. He was immediately struck by this dual emphasis. "I understood that she wasn't teaching technique, she was teaching style," he told an interviewer in 1989. "Style is a special case of technique." Boulanger's classicism was to have just as strong an impact. Where Glass's early music is busy with frantically changing accents, his later music emphasizes harmony rather than rhythm, and in the feeling of calm it exudes is oddly reminiscent of the music of Boulanger's teacher Gabriel Fauré—a precursor about as far from the avant-garde as one can get.

Glass may not have been the first composer to understand that the hundred-year-old idea of the avant-garde was dead, but he was the first to act on that fact without regressing to neo-romanticism—a stylistic direction that appeared in the music of George Crumb, George Rochberg, John Corigliano, David Del Tredici, and others at the same time that minimalism achieved its first wide recognition. The idea of vanguard art assumed the existence of an alienation between artists and the general culture; artists challenged the mainstream through provocation and experiment. In the early part of the twentieth century the most extreme version of vanguardism in music

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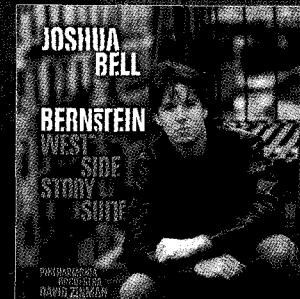
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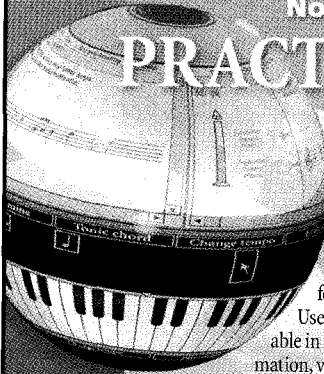
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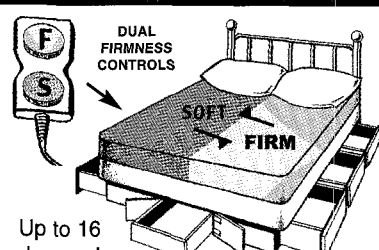
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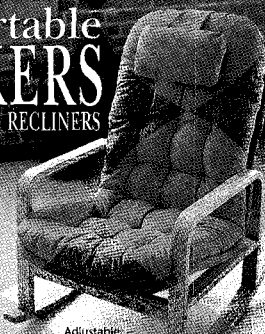
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was the atonality of Arnold Schoenberg. By the 1960s, however, atonality had achieved a place in the establishment (not a very well padded place but a place nevertheless), and the countercultural spirit of the avant-garde had passed into popular music. Neither Reich nor Glass was particularly devoted to rock, even though their artistic coming of age coincided with the moment when it began to be taken seriously as an art form (both are nearing age sixty-five).

Reviving the populist strain in American classical music, which had been in hibernation during the sixties, Glass embraced the ethos of popular music without imitating it. His music already shared tonal harmonies and motor rhythms with rock, so popular elements in his work do not appear as foreign bodies (as they do, for instance, in some of John Adams's). Glass based two of his symphonies, *Low* and *Heroes*, on music by the rock musicians David Bowie and Brian Eno, but they still sound very much like Glass. As he has often acknowledged, this populist approach did not make him a popular composer. His music is not the kind of crossover in which some version of pop music is packaged to attract classical listeners. It is high art for listeners steeped in rock rather than the classics.

By the early 1980s Glass's fame had brought him commissions from classical ensembles, and multiple requests for dance music, new operas, and new theater and film pieces. Of the classical works, the Violin Concerto and—my favorite—the Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra have come closest to being repertory pieces. Glass's concert-hall style is sharply different from that of many postminimalist composers, such as John Adams, Aaron Jay Kernis, and Michael Daugherty. The music of those composers is often extravagant in scoring, eclectic in style, and dramatic or even melodramatic in contour. Glass's music is rigorously chaste in its style and means. His orchestration is plain and functional, with no unusual effects. He uses the same small group of rhythmic figures in almost every piece, along with a limited repertory of textures and figurations.

As in Bach, each movement pursues a single idea and progresses structurally rather than rhetorically. In their refusal of splashy effects the two concertos remind me of certain poignant French music. The Violin Concerto fills a bar or a concert hall with instant *tristesse*. The Saxophone Quartet resists the temptation to sound jazzy, instead alternating meditative calm with rhythmic playfulness of a Stravinskian elegance.

Glass, a serious Buddhist, is a religious composer—something perhaps not to everyone's taste. His Symphony no. 5 is an almost two-hour cantata for chorus and orchestra on texts drawn from the world's religions. On first hearing, it seemed like an interfaith funeral service from hell. But it is not fair to judge this kind of music on the basis of a single listening, especially on a recording. Basking in the afterglow of a successful performance of Glass's Fifth, the conductor Carl St. Clair told me that "there were feelings by musicians and audience alike of elation, peace, inner calm, a great sense of accomplishment, an enriching feeling of brotherhood and unity."

Though I have not gotten there yet with this symphony (I may simply be allergic to works that attempt to sum up mankind's spiritual aspirations), I do recognize a nobility that distinguishes Glass's music from that of any of his contemporaries. In my mind that quality links his music to that of Christoph Willibald Gluck, also a theatrical composer, who drastically simplified the musical idiom of the mid eighteenth century. Gluck's most famous piece, "The Dance of the Blessed Spirits" (from *Orfeo ed Euridice*), has a title that Glass could often have used. Like Gluck's, Glass's music has the virtues and limitations deriving from a reformer's zeal: it is expressively pure but not rich; it has structural coherence but little flexibility. Glass is our Gluck, and not our Mozart (the most recent Mozartian was Benjamin Britten). It is miracle enough that he has achieved such integrity at a time when most of the classical-music world thinks of itself as engaged in an every-man-for-himself endgame. ▀



THE PUZZLER

by EMILY COX and HENRY RATHVON

Faces

The diagram shows cubes in rows of six, their top faces numbered 1-36, their side faces opened like flaps of a box, and their bottom faces obscured. Each cube has a letter on each face; these six letters can be arranged to form a Cube Word. Overlapping side faces share a letter. Clues are also given for six Top Face Words. Squares at the sides of the diagram are already filled appropriately. Letters on the 36 unseen bottom faces, taken in order, spell out a quotation (one we hope *not* to hear from any solver) and its source. Answers include three proper nouns. For this puzzle idea we are indebted to "Ad," of *The Listener*.

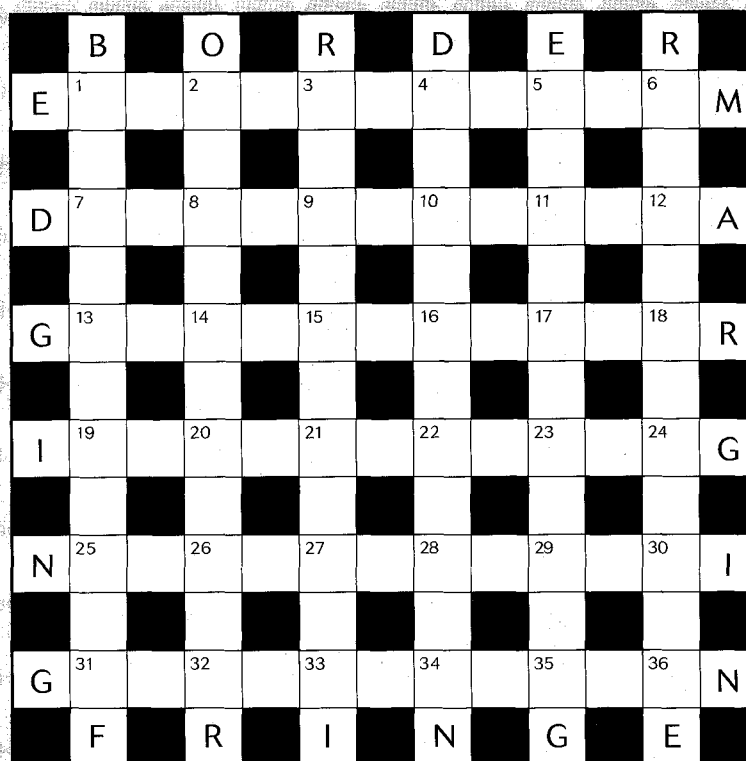
Last month's Puzzler solution is on page 167.

TOP FACE WORDS

- 1-6. Face #6, wise guy
7-12. King, according to *The Voice*,
in ruins
13-18. Recited "Aura Lee" out loud
19-24. Western picture's supporter is
sneaky sort
25-30. Possibility of Gregorian pieces
heard
31-36. Engineer clouts bug

CUBE WORDS

1. Face of bull, sheep, cow or ox
2. Clue found in true Japanese religion
3. Holds first of peas in pot
4. Great opera star turned pregnant
5. Joining sea in France and Germany
6. Time of year for problem solver
7. Scarcely emotional in court room
8. Aimless medical drama ran on time
9. Trims branches away from some fruit
10. Taxis parked outside of popular
houses
11. Twerp wearing old sleeveless jacket
12. Outings with Jay and kin



13. Pair of bodies received by a South
American city
14. In the sound, make like a seal boat
15. Rock measures for an audience
16. Show hesitation, failing to change
17. Lieutenant pens song line that's
catchy?
18. Bird call receives an "A"
19. A wig he moved off the floor?
20. Drug dealer is picture's first
leading man?
21. Fast food outside a square
22. Serve Buddhist sect's groups
23. Packed kind of cap before Gym Day
24. Group of stars happy about West
Coast airport
25. Company man forceful and to the point
26. Compose an essay about savannah's
last snake
27. Thousand and one calls from ravens
and parrots
28. Boats made of sticks with
nothing inside
29. Oscar-winning actress in room by
kindergarten
30. Desserts split by nine elves
31. Ensign aboard vessel
32. Stew in the past eaten by
longstanding habit
33. Piece about source of UHF channel
34. Goddess covering Eastern scenes
35. Wild except when straddling Silver
36. Bring up pop and rock musical

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

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WORD FUGITIVES

by BARBARA WALLRAFF

Far be it from the readers of this magazine to unquestioningly do as they're told. Asked in the April *Atlantic* to invent a replacement for the ever more anachronistic verb *dial* in relation to the telephone, readers mostly had other ideas. A number of them pointed out that words such as *enter*, *press*, *punch in*, and *touch* are already widely used as synonyms for *dial*, and they often added comments like "*Dial* has' probably already become meaningless, but we don't need a neologism," as Patricia Bereck Weikersheimer, of Downers Grove, Illinois, put it.

Some people preferred to defend *dial*, even if the word is no longer strictly accurate. Bill Myer, of Kinnelon, New Jersey, drew an analogy: "We still call playing cards and credit cards *cards* even though they're made of plastic, but *card* comes from a root meaning 'leaf' or 'papyrus.'" Jack Miles, of Pasadena, California, wrote, "I frankly hope that *dial* will survive. Why deprive future generations of the fun of reading its etymology?" Lisa Stefano, of East Boston, Massachusetts, wrote to boast that she actually has a rotary phone, which her husband rescued from a Dumpster. She continued, "One day I was using the phone (*dialing*!) and one of my daughter's little friends, four years old, poked her head into the room in alarm, demanding an explanation of the noise I was making. Truthfully, I usually walk around the house with my cordless headset phone. When I use my headset phone, I am not *dialing* numbers but *calling* them."

Others invoked words from foreign languages or submitted English words used in one part of the world or of our country. "German helps us out with *wählen*, translated as *select* or *choose*," Fred Rosenberg, of Westlake Village, California, wrote. *Compose*, cognate with the word used in French, was suggested

by several people, among them Oleh Havrylyshyn, of Rockville, Maryland, who wrote, "This usage would delight the Académie française, since more borrowings have gone in the other direction." Several readers pointed out that people in Britain say *ring*. And four separately wrote about a southern regionalism. Obviously, this isn't a word they coined; in fact, it appears in the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. All the same, it earns top honors for one of the people who sent it in—Ed Ringness, of Seattle, Washington, whose letter arrived first. Once, on a business trip to Raleigh, North Carolina, Ringness



was having trouble with his rental car, he wrote, "and a friendly taxi driver stopped to let me use his cellular phone." The driver, explaining how to make a call, "used the word *mash* in place of *dial* or *press*—as in *mash* your number, then *mash* 'send.'"

Also sought in the April issue was a word for "having tongue-in-cheek wit taken literally." Steve Adams, of Westford, Massachusetts, wrote, "As an Englishman with over a decade of anthropological research experience in this topic gained by living in the United States, I have confirmed with fellow expats that the word best describing a

person exhibiting the literalist trait is *American*." Jennifer Davis and Andy Kopra, of Los Angeles, suggested *witeralist*; Robert Powers, of Abingdon, Maryland, *humoron*; and Christopher McLemore, of Manhattan, Kansas, *dumb aleck*. But a name for a person who takes humor literally isn't quite what was wanted. Tom Linde, of Seattle, Washington, takes top honors for *concretinism*.

NOW EVELIN SULLIVAN, of Redwood City, California, writes, "How about a word for an object that works only if one employs a trick known to its owner or frequent user, like jiggling it, putting pressure on it, warming it, or blowing on it?"

AND MANISH PATWARI, of Montreal, Quebec, writes, "There are more than a hundred phobias listed in specialized dictionaries, and quite a few of these appear in the unabridged versions of major lexicons like *Webster's* or *Oxford*. But is there a word for the fear of inadvertently throwing something valuable out with the garbage? Two years ago I found my ring with precious stones in the garbage just before I was about to put it out on the driveway. Since then I always check the garbage bags twice before putting out the trash. I am sure at least a few other people have this fear."

Send words that meet Evelin Sullivan's or Manish Patwari's purposes to *Word Fugitives*, The Atlantic Monthly, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or visit the *Word Fugitives* page on our Web site, at www.theatlantic.com/fugitives. Submissions must be received by August 30. Use the same addresses to submit word fugitives that you'd like The Atlantic's help in finding. Letters become the property of *Word Fugitives* and may be edited.

Readers whose queries are published and those whose words are singled out for top honors will each receive, with our thanks, a selection of recent autographed books by Atlantic authors. The next installment's correspondents will be sent *Free Flight*, by James Fallows; *Fast Food Nation*, by Eric Schlosser; and my own *Word Court*.

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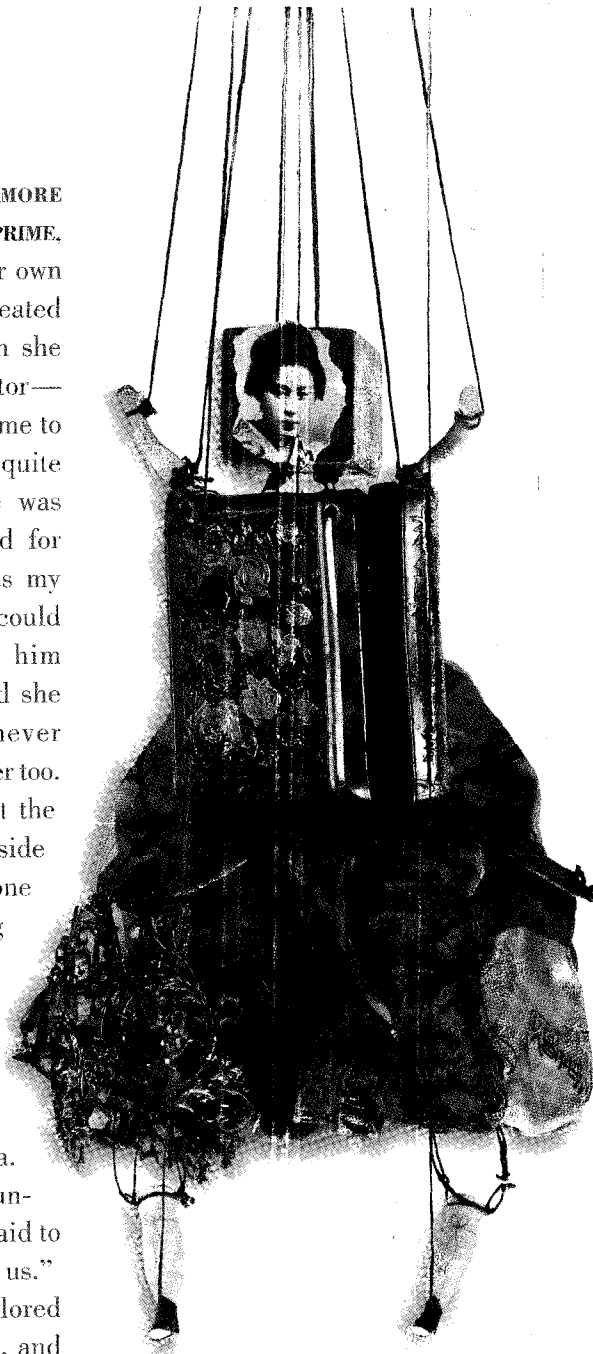
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when we build them.

KOHINA TURNED OUT TO BE AN EVEN MORE CELEBRATED GEISHA THAN I WAS IN MY PRIME, but I don't think she ever recognized her own beauty. She never understood why men treated her the way they did. I remember when she was an apprentice, there was a certain actor—let's call him Mr. Ikeda—who used to come to the Gion district all the time. He was quite popular among the geisha because he was rarely moody, but he never once asked for me—until, that is, I took on Kohina as my younger sister and began to train her. I could tell from the start that Kohina found him enchanting: she'd seen all his films, and she was in awe, really. Yet somehow it never occurred to her he might feel attracted to her too.

Then one evening as we arrived at the Mitsuyo Teahouse, the mistress took us aside to say that Mr. Ikeda had been sitting alone a half-hour in the little room overlooking the moss garden, turning down all her offers of company, just waiting for us and no one else. We slid the door open a crack to peek in, and there he sat, drawing lines in the beaded moisture on an unopened bottle of Absolut Vodka. Beside it on the table stood two untouched glasses. "Only two glasses," I said to Kohina. "He's waiting for you, not both of us."

She was wearing a cinnamon-colored kimono with a design of autumn grasses, and she looked magnificent, but I could see she had no confidence in herself. I'm not sure what she would have done if I hadn't stepped aside and slid the door open so she had no choice but to go in. She gave me such a look! Nervous and excited all at once. The flush in her skin reminded me how she'd appeared that afternoon when she'd stepped from the bath into the chilly air, still steaming. ■



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